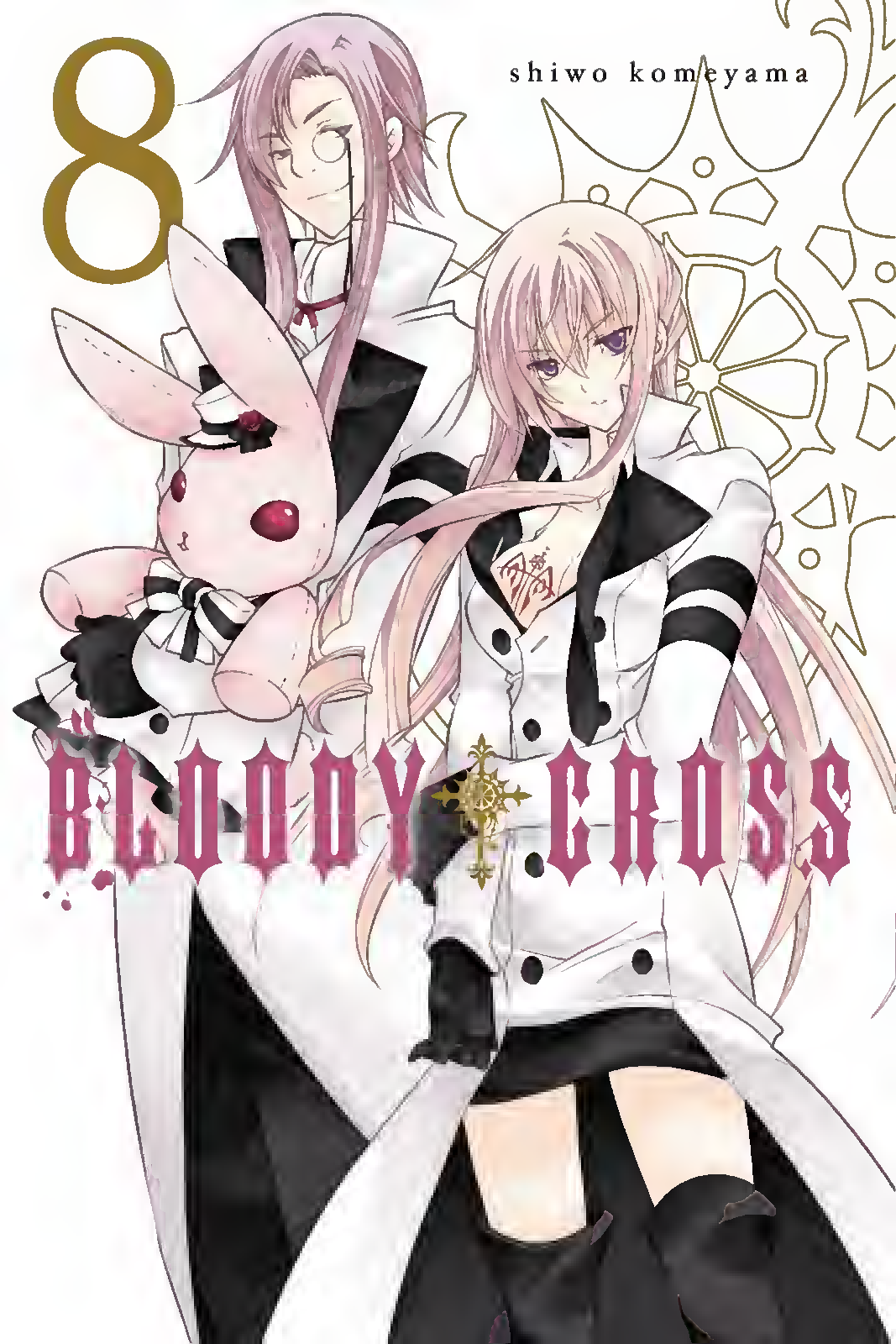
8

shiwo komeyama



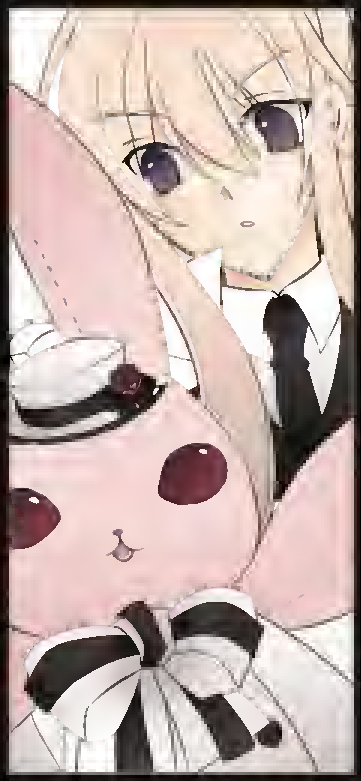
BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

Shiwo Komeyama

8

BLOODY CROSS



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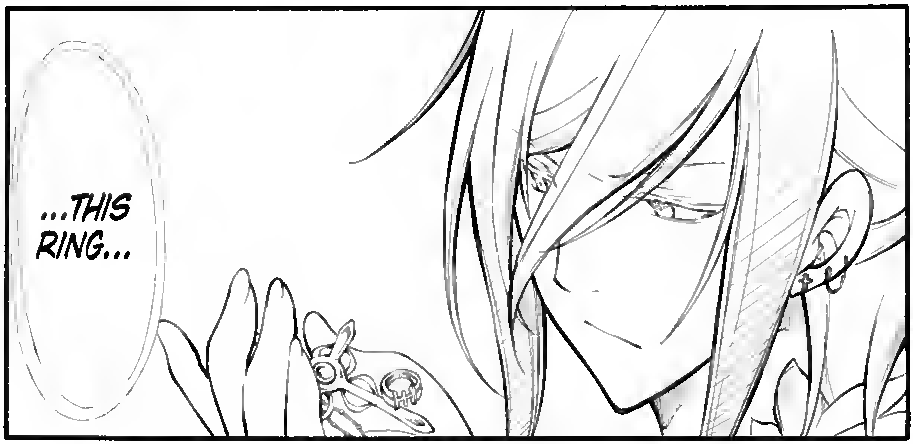
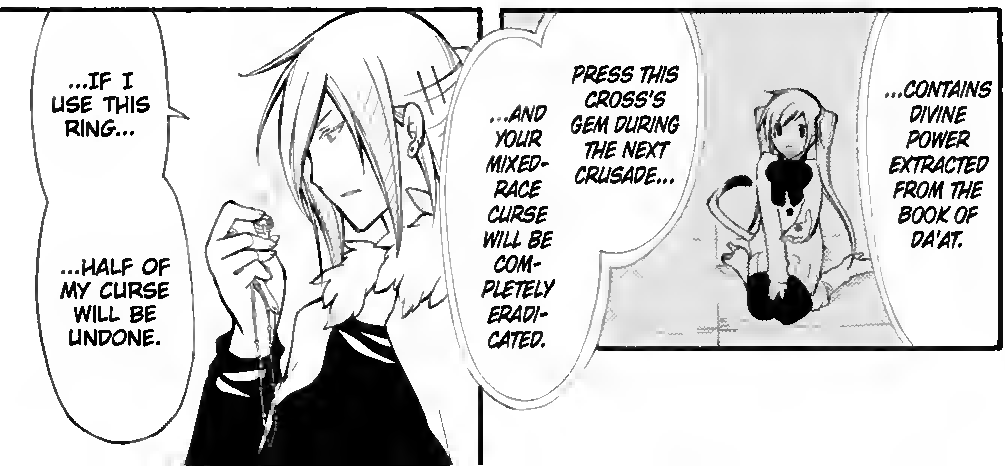
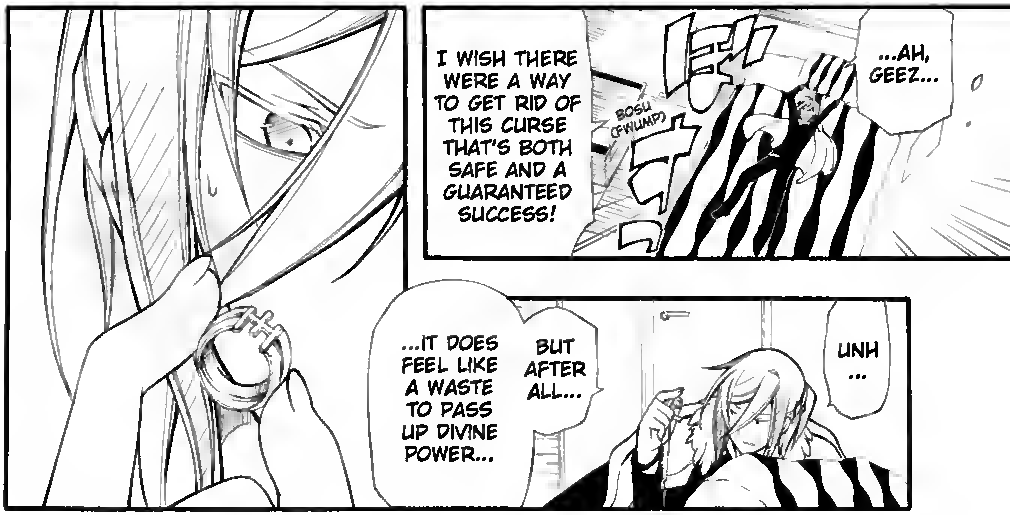
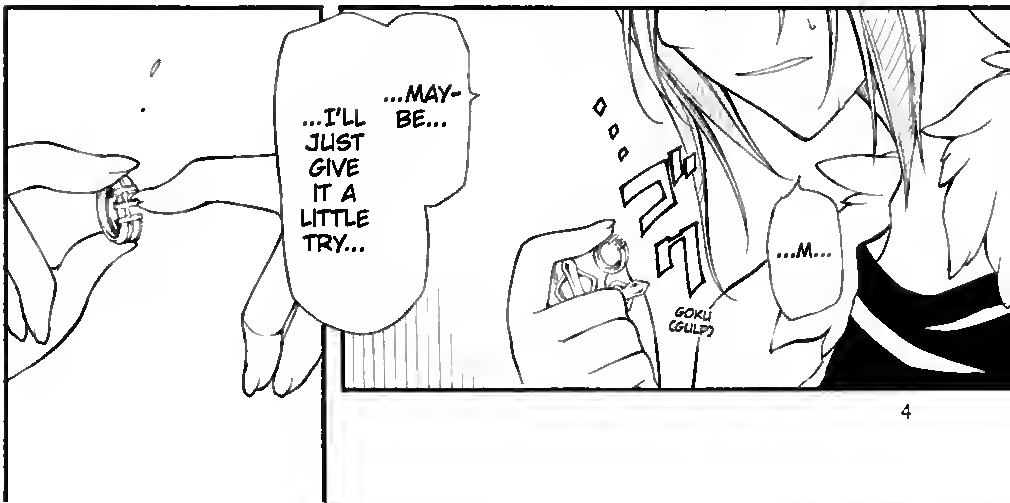
Chapter 36
The Solitary One



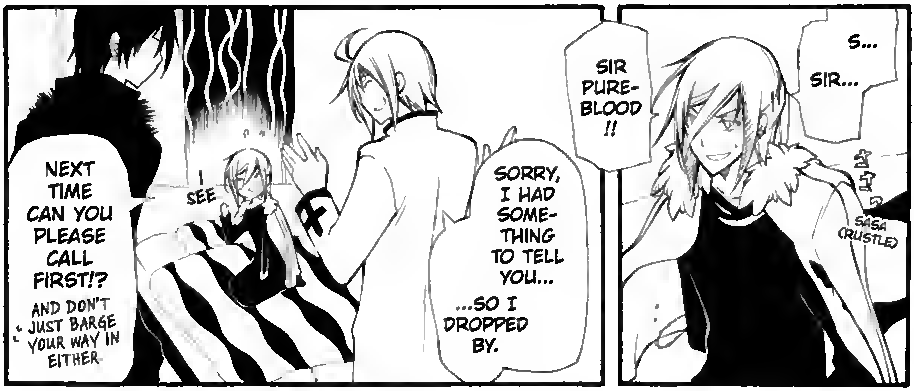

...IF I USE THIS RING...
...HALF OF MY CURSE WILL BE UNDONE.
...AND YOUR MIXED-RACE CURSE WILL BE COMPLETELY ERADICATED.
PRESS THIS CROSS'S GEM DURING THE NEXT CRUSADE...
...CONTAINS DIVINE POWER EXTRACTED FROM THE BOOK OF DA'AT.

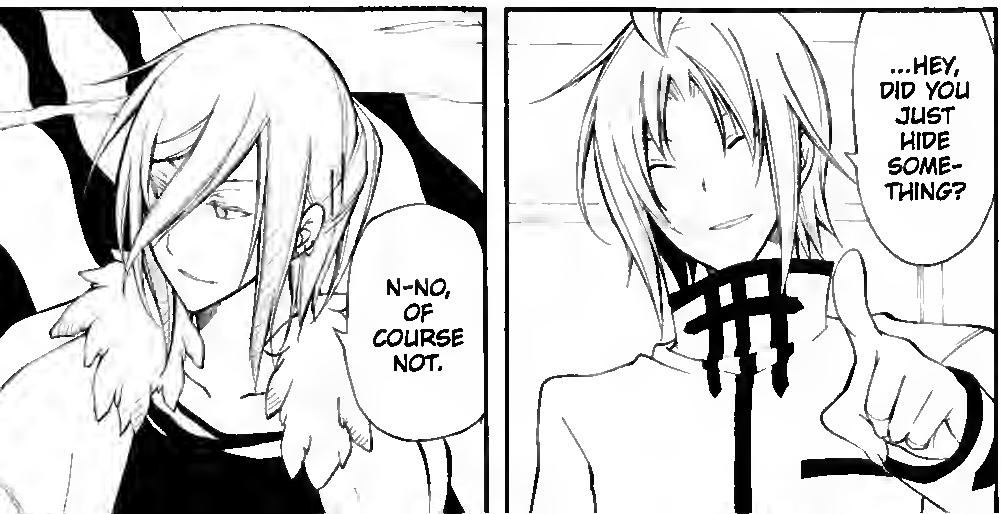
THE FITS COULD FLARE UP AGAIN AT ANY TIME...
...AH, GETTING RID OF THIS CURSE TO ENSURE MY SURVIVAL IS TOP PRIORITY
BUT I'D ALSO LIKE TO DO RIGHT BY TSUZUKI...
BESIDES WHICH, IS IT EVEN SAFE FOR ME TO RELY ON SATSUKI'S POWER?
HMM...

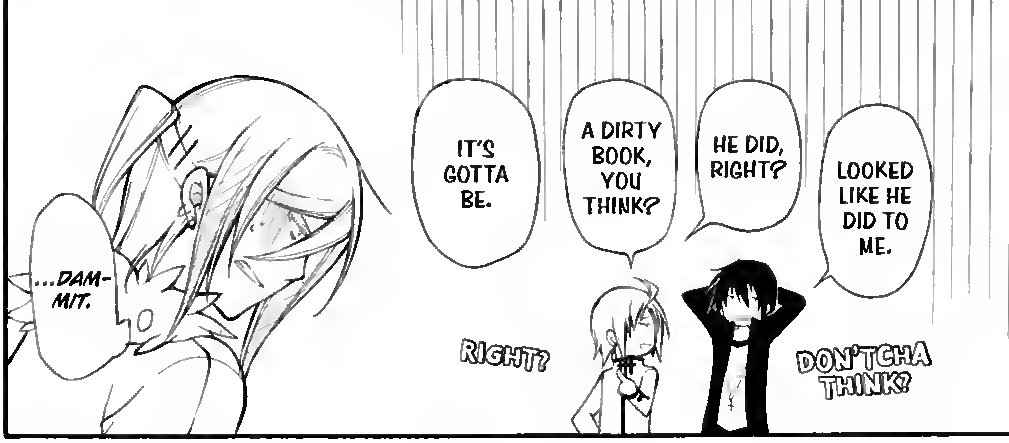

...AH, GEEZ...
BOSU (PLUMP)
I WISH THERE WERE A WAY TO GET RID OF THIS CURSE THAT'S BOTH SAFE AND A GUARANTEED SUCCESS!
UNH...
BUT AFTER ALL...
...IT DOES FEEL LIKE A WASTE TO PASS UP DIVINE POWER...

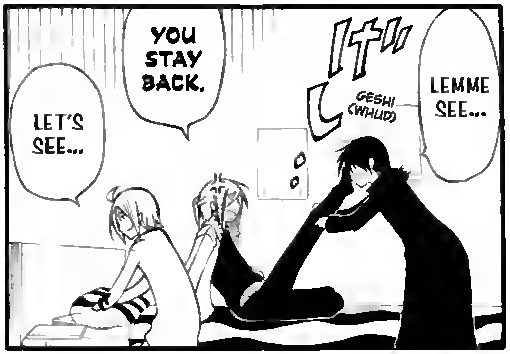

...M...
GOKU (GULP)
...MAY-BE...
...I'LL JUST GIVE IT A LITTLE TRY...

BAAAN (SLAM)
AH! THERE HE IS!
WAAAH!!
YOU SCARED ME!!!

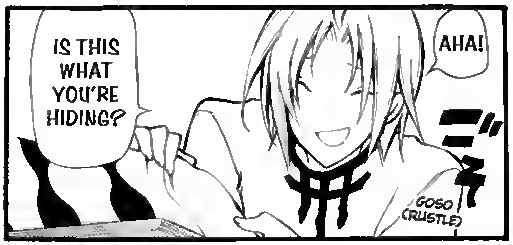

S...
SIR...
SAGA (RUSTLE)
SIR PURE-BLOOD!!
SORRY, I HAD SOME-THING TO TELL YOU...
...SO I DROPPED BY.
I SEE
NEXT TIME CAN YOU PLEASE CALL FIRST!?
AND DON'T JUST BARGE YOUR WAY IN EITHER


...HEY, DID YOU JUST HIDE SOME-THING?
N-NO, OF COURSE NOT.

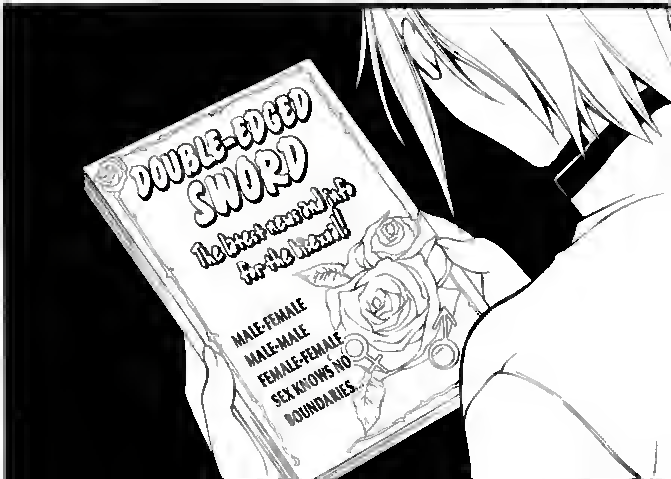

...DAM-MIT.
IT'S GOTTA BE.
A DIRTY BOOK, YOU THINK?
HE DID, RIGHT?
LOOKED LIKE HE DID TO ME.
RIGHT?
DON'TCHA THINK?


YOU STAY BACK.
LET'S SEE...
GESHI (WHALID)
LEMME SEE...

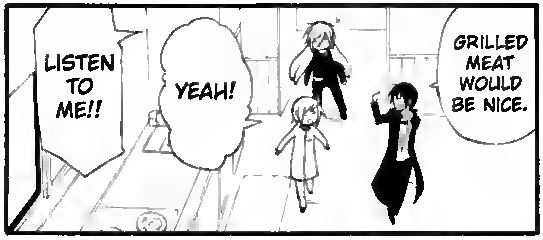
I'M FINALLY ON GOOD TERMS WITH TSUZUKI AGAIN, BUT IF THEY SEE SATSUKI'S STUFF...!!
PLEASE TURN A BLIND EYE TO MY LEWD LITERATURE!!
FOR-GIVE ME!
GUWA (LURCH)

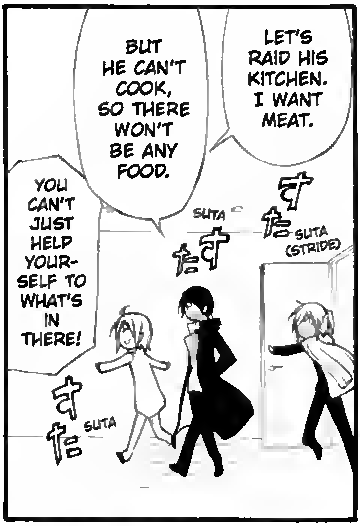

IS THIS WHAT YOU'RE HIDING?
AHA!
GOSO (RUSTLE)

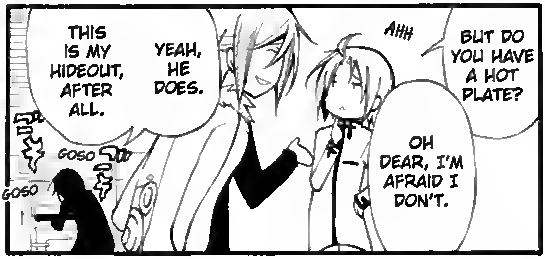
I'LL JUST BE PUTTING THAT BACK NOW

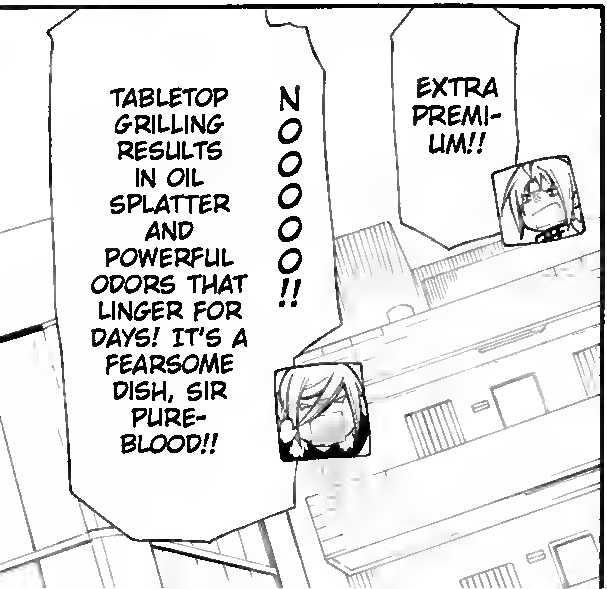

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD
The best manga in the land!
MALE-FEMALE
MALE-MALE
FEMALE-FEMALE
SEX KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES...

YOU GO HOME.
FORGET TEA. WHAT ABOUT SOME GRUB?
I DIDN'T EAT BREAKFAST
GULUL (GURGLE)
TASHI
TASHI
TASHI (PAT)
...W-W-W-WELL, N-N-N-NEVER MIND. SO WHERE'S MY TEA? MY TEA!


LISTEN TO ME!!
YEAH!
GRILLED MEAT WOULD BE NICE.

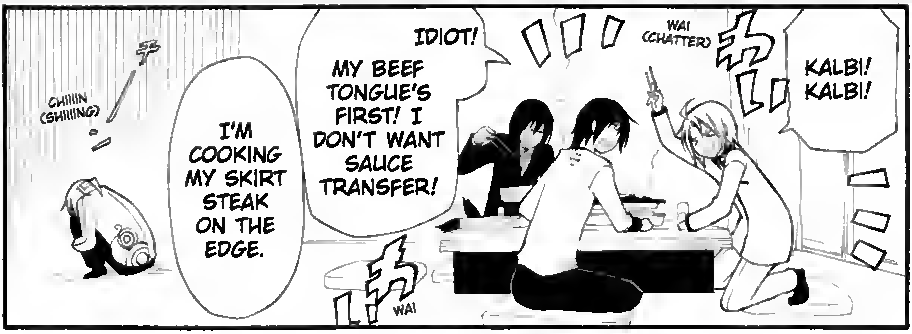

BUT HE CAN'T COOK, SO THERE WON'T BE ANY FOOD.
LET'S RAID HIS KITCHEN. I WANT MEAT.
YOU CAN'T JUST HELP YOURSELF TO WHAT'S IN THERE!
SUTA
SUTA (STRIDE)
SUTA

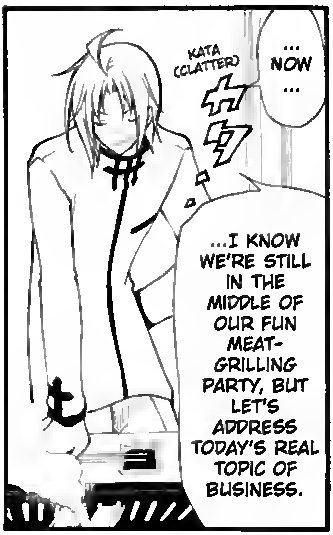

THIS IS MY HIDEOUT, AFTER ALL.
YEAH, HE DOES.
AHH
BUT DO YOU HAVE A HOT PLATE?
OH DEAR, I'M AFRAID I DON'T.
GOSO
GOSO

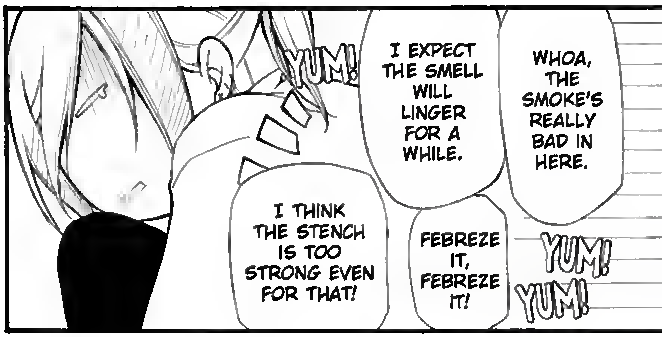

TABLETOP GRILLING RESULTS IN OIL SPLATTER AND POWERFUL ODORS THAT LINGER FOR DAYS! IT'S A FEARSOME DISH, SIR PURE-BLOOD!!
NOOOOOO!!
EXTRA PREMI-UM!!

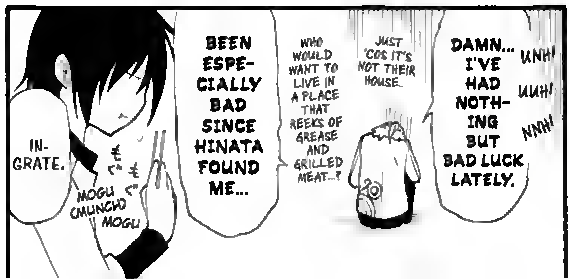
DAM-MIT!
AAAAAA
HEY HANA-MURA?
GO BUY SOME MEAT FOR GRILLING.

PACKAGE: EXTRA PREMIUM

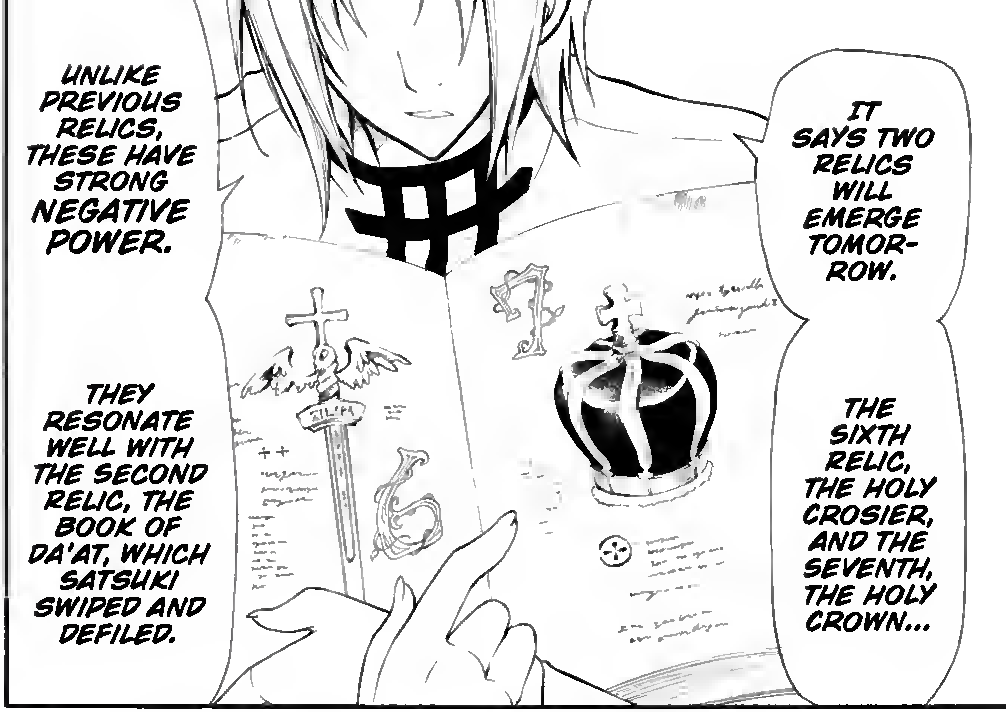



KATA (CLATTER)
... NOW ...
...I KNOW WE'RE STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR FUN MEAT-GRILLING PARTY, BUT LET'S ADDRESS TODAY'S REAL TOPIC OF BUSINESS.


YUM!
I EXPECT THE SMELL WILL LINGER FOR A WHILE.
WHOA, THE SMOKE'S REALLY BAD IN HERE.
I THINK THE STENCH IS TOO STRONG EVEN FOR THAT!
FEBREZE IT, FEBREZE IT!
YUM! YUM!


IN-GRATE.
MOGU CHUNCHU MOGU
BEEN ESPE-CIALLY BAD SINCE HINATA FOUND ME...
WHO WOULD WANT TO LIVE IN A PLACE THAT REEKS OF GREASE AND GRILLED MEAT...?
JUST 'COS IT'S NOT THEIR HOUSE.
DAMN... I'VE HAD NOTHI-NG BUT BAD LUCK LATELY.
UNH!
UUH!
NNH!

LISTEN UP, ALL.
IT'S ABOUT TOMOR-ROW'S CRUSADE!!
BI (POINT)
SU (SHIP)
NOW THAT I'VE DECODED THE FIRST PROPHECY BOOK...
...THE WIND'S DIRECTION SHALL TAKE A DRAMATIC SHIFT COM-PARED TO EARLIER CRU-SADES.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
PERA (FLIP)
JUST SIT BACK AND LISTEN.
I HAVE LEARNED THAT THIS PROPHECY BOOK— AH, WHICH IS APPARENTLY CALLED THE BOOK OF KETER...
.....!
...ALONG WITH THE FIFTH RELIC—THE BOOK OF CHOKHMAH THAT SATSUKI STOLE LAST TIME...
...APPEARS TO INCLUDE PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE RELICS THAT WILL APPEAR DURING CRUSADES.

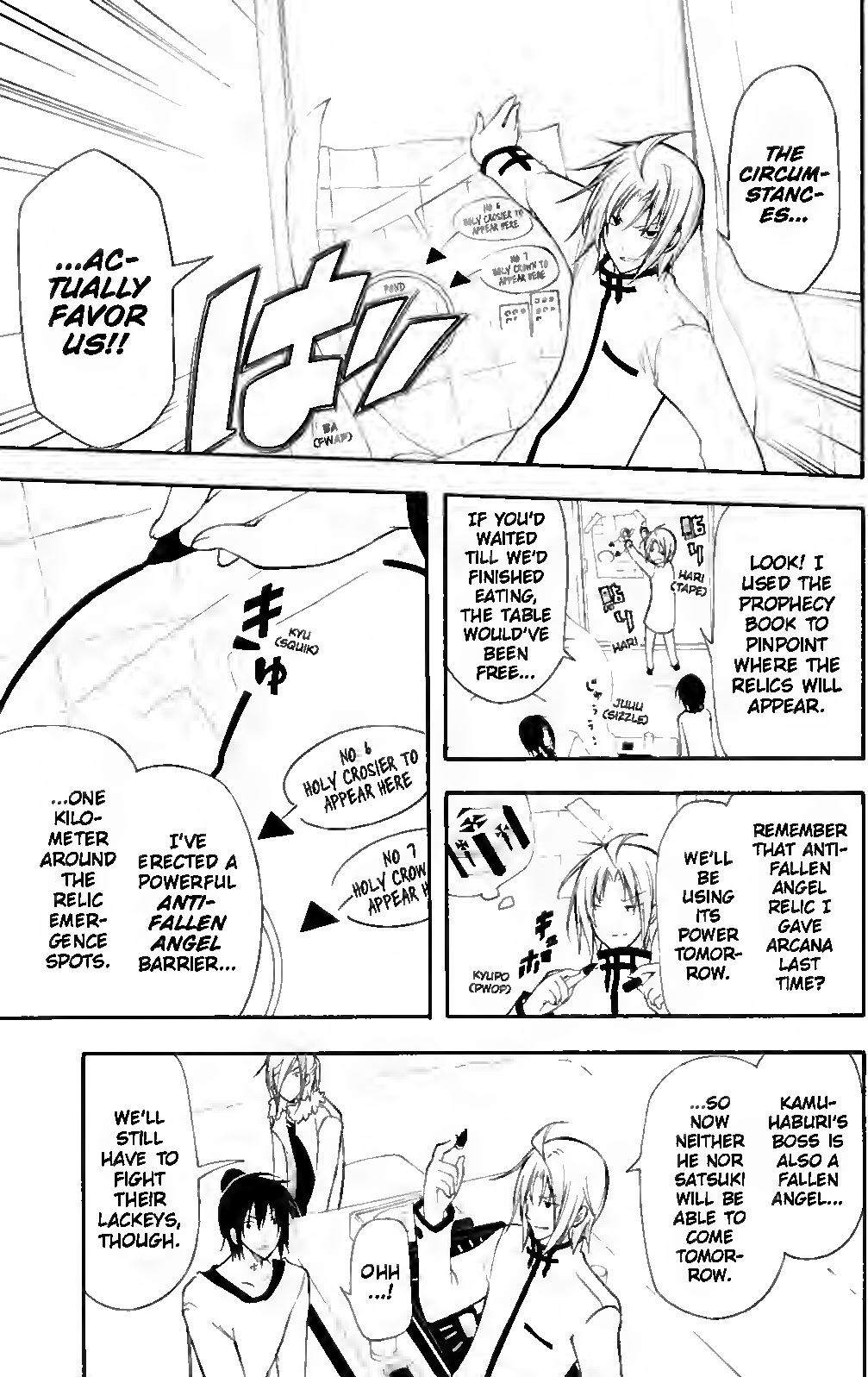

IT SAYS TWO RELICS WILL EMERGE TOMORROW.
THE SIXTH RELIC, THE HOLY CROSIER, AND THE SEVENTH, THE HOLY CROWN...
UNLIKE PREVIOUS RELICS, THESE HAVE STRONG NEGATIVE POWER.
THEY RESONATE WELL WITH THE SECOND RELIC, THE BOOK OF DA'AT, WHICH SATSUKI SWIPED AND DEFILED.

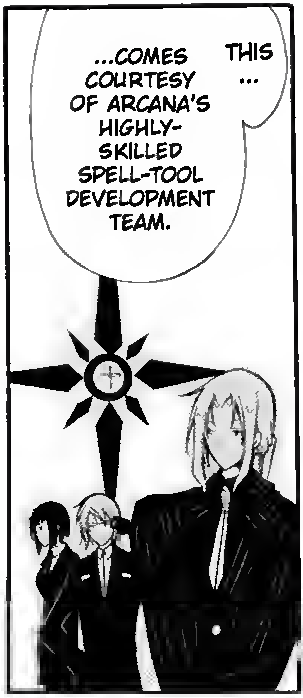
...IN FACT ...
...THEIR POWER ACTUALLY FAVORS SATSUKI SIMPLY BECAUSE HE'S A FALLEN ANGEL.

TCH, MY MINIONS ARE SUCH PESSIMISTS!
BOKO (BOP)
OW!

IF WE LET HIM GET THESE RELICS, HE'LL GAIN A HUGE BOOST.
WE CAN'T ALLOW HIS SIDE TO TAKE THEM.
A FALLEN ANGEL, KAMUHABURI ...
DO WE HAVE ANY CHANCE OF WINNING THIS?

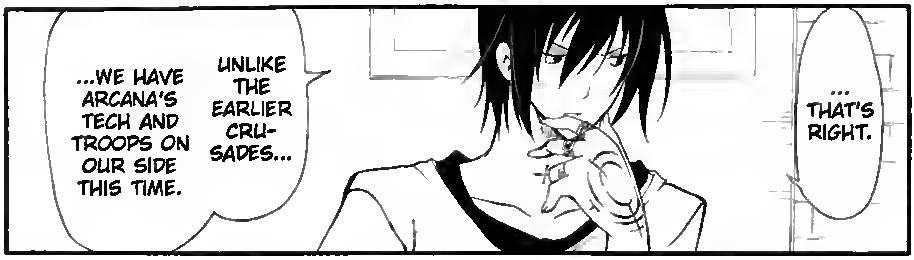
HUNH ?
WELL, I SUPPOSE IT'S NATURAL.
BUT FEAR NOT.
FOR I, YOUR MASTER AND FUTURE GOD, HAVE A MORE OPTIMISTIC VIEW.

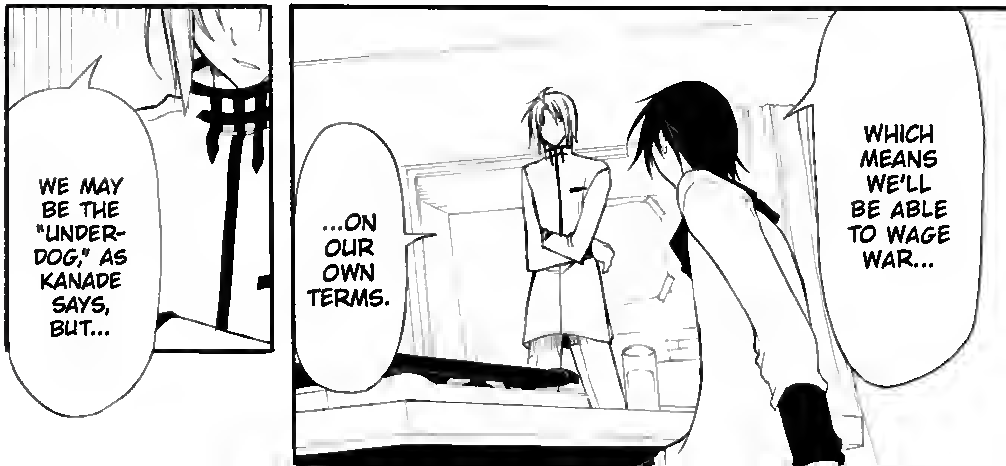

THE CIRCUM-STANC-ES...
...AC-TUALLY FAVOR US!!
BA (PWAP)
PAND
NO 6 HOLY CROSIER TO APPEAR HERE
NO 7 HOLY CROWN TO APPEAR HERE
KYU (SQUIK)
...ONE KILO-METER AROUND THE RELIC EMER-GENCE SPOTS.
I'VE ERECTED A POWERFUL ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER...
NO 6 HOLY CROSIER TO APPEAR HERE
NO 7 HOLY CROWN TO APPEAR H
IF YOU'D WAITED TILL WE'D FINISHED EATING, THE TABLE WOULD'VE BEEN FREE...
HARI (TAPE)
HARI
JUUU (SIZZLE)
LOOK! I USED THE PROPHECY BOOK TO PINPOINT WHERE THE RELICS WILL APPEAR.
KYUPO (PWOP)
WE'LL BE USING ITS POWER TOMOR-ROW.
REMEMBER THAT ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL RELIC I GAVE ARCANA LAST TIME?
WE'LL STILL HAVE TO FIGHT THEIR LACKEYS, THOUGH.
OHH ...!
...SO NOW NEITHER HE NOR SATSUKI WILL BE ABLE TO COME TOMOR-ROW.
KAMU-HABURI'S BOSS IS ALSO A FALLEN ANGEL...


THIS ...
...COMES COURTESY OF ARCANA'S HIGHLY-SKILLED SPELL-TOOL DEVELOPMENT TEAM.

ALSO ...
GOGO (RUMMAGE)
...BASED ON OUR EXPERIENCE WHEN ARCANA WAS RAIDED...

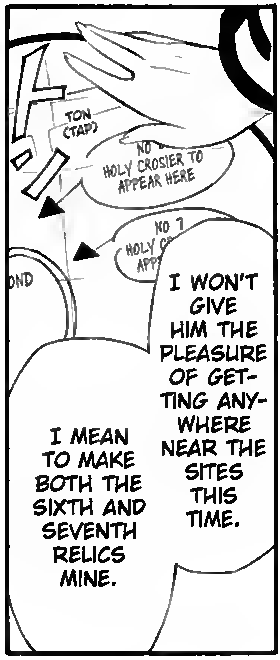
...WE HAD AN ITEM MADE THAT WILL BLOCK THE EFFECTS OF THE ANTI-ANGEL RELIC IN KAMUHABURI'S POSSESSION.
WE CAN'T AFFORD FOR THEM TO USE IT AGAINST TSUZUKI AGAIN.
PAKA (POP)


... THAT'S RIGHT.
UNLIKE THE EARLIER CRUSADES...
...WE HAVE ARCANA'S TECH AND TROOPS ON OUR SIDE THIS TIME.


WHICH MEANS WE'LL BE ABLE TO WAGE WAR...
...ON OUR OWN TERMS.
WE MAY BE THE "UNDERDOG," AS KANADE SAYS, BUT...

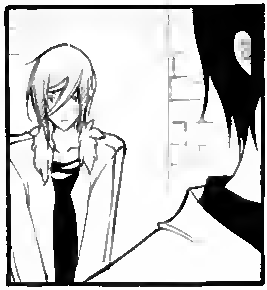
...I DON'T BUY IT.
AND I HAVE NO INTENTION OF LOSING TO SATSUKI REGARD-LESS.

I'M THE ONE...
...WHO WILL BECOME GOD.
ESPECIALLY SINCE THESE TWO ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE AN AFFINITY FOR HIM.

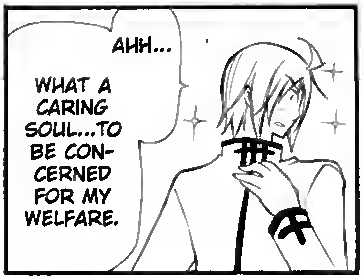

TON (TAP)
HOLY CROSIER TO APPEAR HERE
I WON'T GIVE HIM THE PLEASURE OF GET-TING ANY-WHERE NEAR THE SITES THIS TIME.
I MEAN TO MAKE BOTH THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH RELICS MINE.

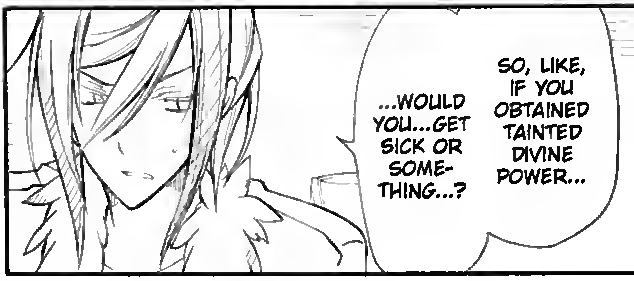
ABOUT THESE RELICS APPEARING TOMOR-ROW...

I HAVE A QUES-TION.
SU (SHFF)
...UM...

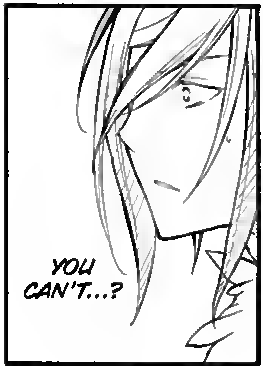


WHEN YOU SAY THEY HAVE STRONG NEGATIVE POWER...
...DO YOU MEAN THEIR DIVINE POWER IS POLLUTED?


AHH...
WHAT A CARING SOUL...TO BE CONCERNED FOR MY WELFARE.

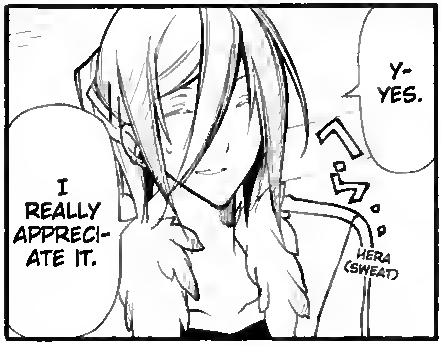

SO, LIKE, IF YOU OBTAINED TAINTED DIVINE POWER...
...WOULD YOU...GET SICK OR SOMETHING...?

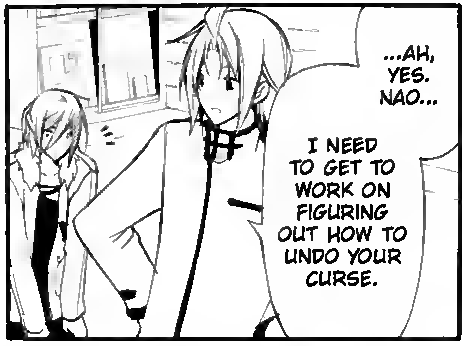
BE AT EASE. TAINTED OR NOT, DIVINE POWER IS DIVINE POWER.
IT'S NOT THE KIND OF DISTINCTION THAT COULD HARM A PERSON.
KYURARARA (SPARKLE)
...BUT WHAT IF SOMEONE MESSED WITH IT?
MESSED?

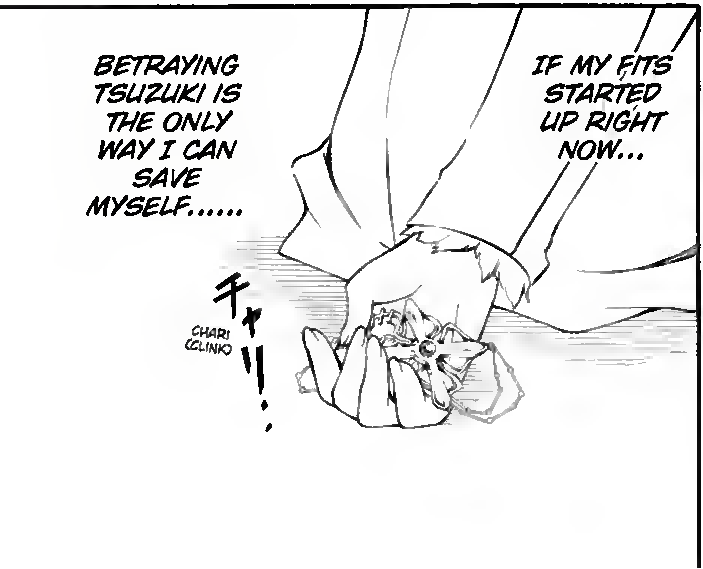

YOU CAN'T...?

AT LEAST, NOT UNTIL ONE BECOMES THE TRUE GOD. THAT GOES FOR BOTH ME OR SATSUKI.
HA HA...
YOU CAN'T MESS WITH DIVINE POWER!

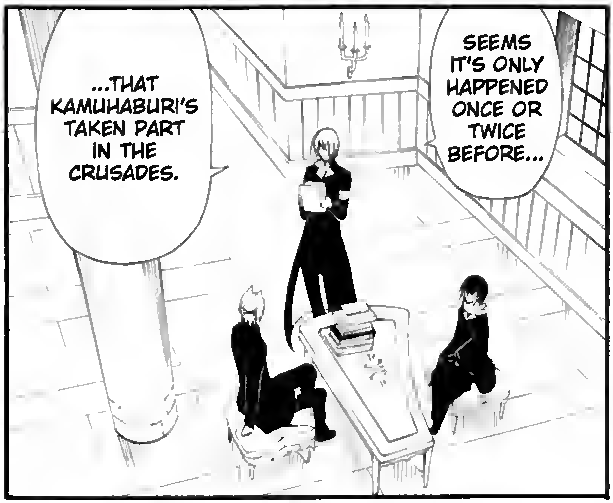
...I WON'T DIE OR GET WORSE..... OR ANY-THING!
THEN EVEN IF I USE THE DIVINE POWER SATSUKI GAVE ME...


Y-YES.
I REALLY APPRECI-ATE IT.
HERA (SWEAT)

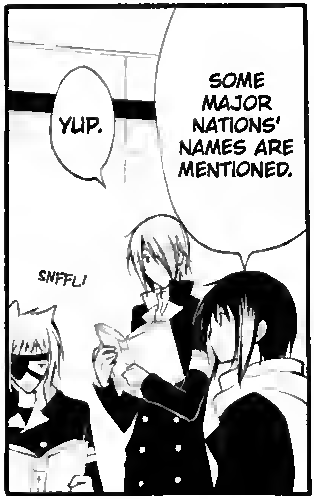

...AH, YES. NAO...
I NEED TO GET TO WORK ON FIGURING OUT HOW TO UNDO YOUR CURSE.


BETRAYING TSUZUKI IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN SAVE MYSELF.....
IF MY FITS STARTED UP RIGHT NOW...
CHARI (CLINK)
チャ!!

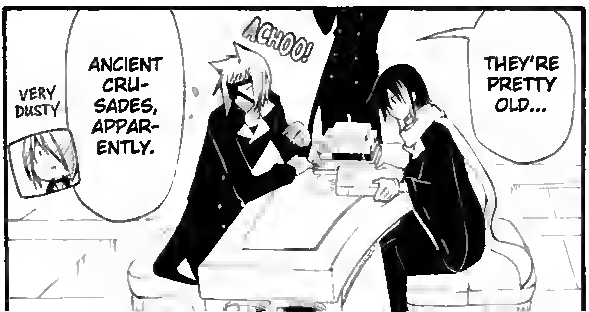
—THERE'S NO WAY.
TSUZUKI DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH DIVINE POWER IN HIS POSSESSION TO SHARE WITH ME.

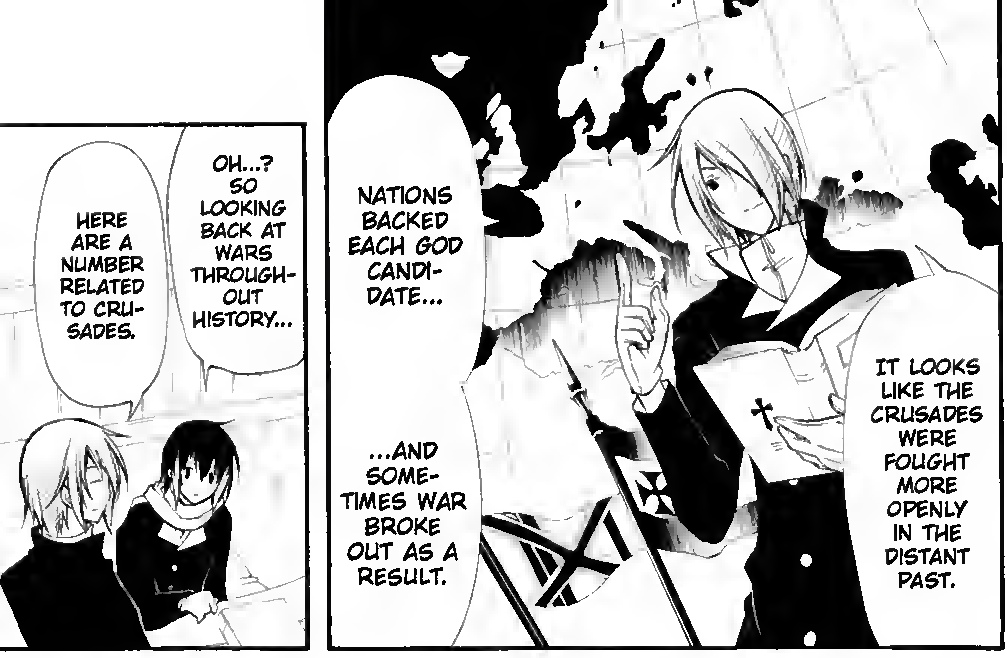

...THAT KAMUHABURI'S TAKEN PART IN THE CRUSADES.
SEEMS IT'S ONLY HAPPENED ONCE OR TWICE BEFORE...

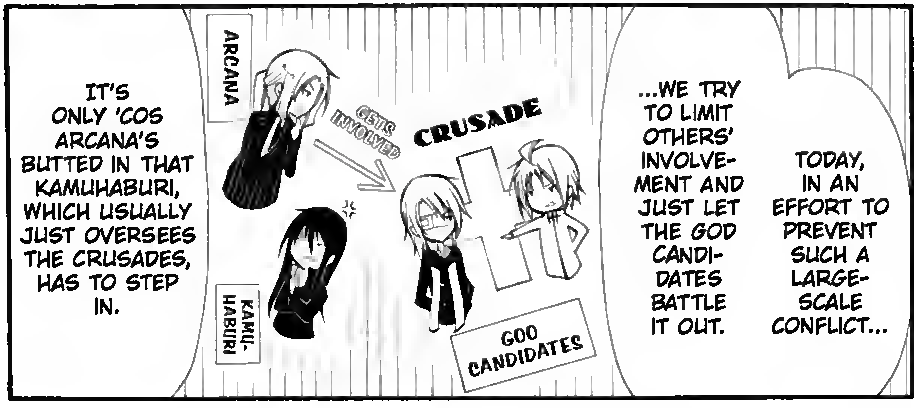
I'VE DONE SOME RESEARCH.
DOSA (THUMP)
DOSA

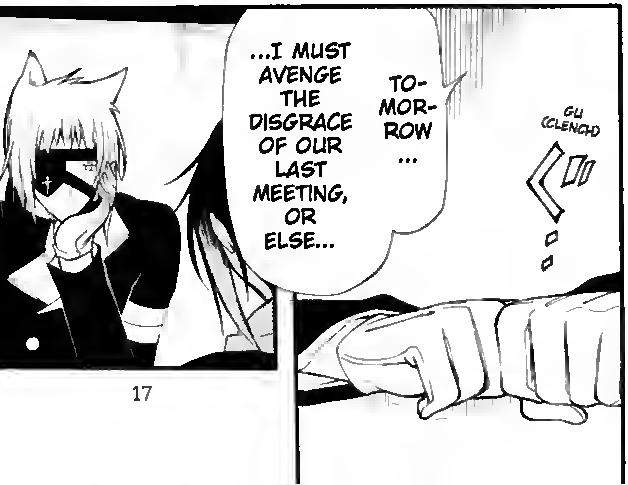

SOME MAJOR NATIONS' NAMES ARE MENTIONED.
YUP.
SNFFL!

I'M HOPING OLD TACTICS AND TROOP ASSIGN-MENTS...
...AND THE CRUSADE TIMELINE MIGHT BE HELPFUL.

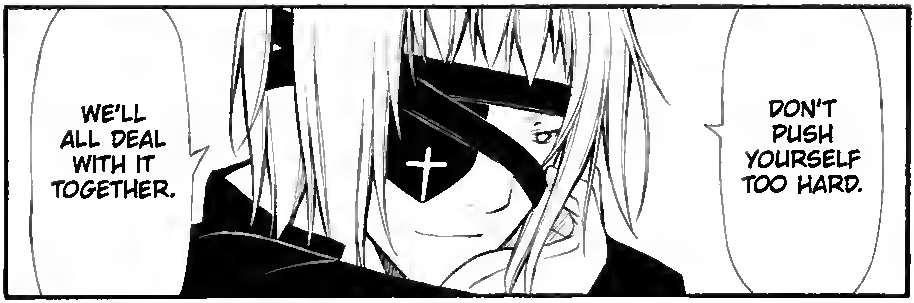

THEY'RE PRETTY OLD...
ACHOO!
ANCIENT CRU-SADES, APPAR-ENTLY.
VERY DUSTY


IT LOOKS LIKE THE CRUSADES WERE FOUGHT MORE OPENLY IN THE DISTANT PAST.
NATIONS BACKED EACH GOD CANDIDATE...
...AND SOMETIMES WAR BROKE OUT AS A RESULT.
OH...? SO LOOKING BACK AT WARS THROUGHOUT HISTORY...
HERE ARE A NUMBER RELATED TO CRUSADES.


TODAY, IN AN EFFORT TO PREVENT SUCH A LARGE-SCALE CONFLICT...
...WE TRY TO LIMIT OTHERS' INVOLVEMENT AND JUST LET THE GOD CANDIDATES BATTLE IT OUT.
ARCANA
CRUSADE
GODS INVOLVED
GOD CANDIDATES
KAMUHABURI
IT'S ONLY 'COS ARCANA'S BUTTED IN THAT KAMUHABURI, WHICH USUALLY JUST OVERSEES THE CRUSADES, HAS TO STEP IN.


AR-CANA ...
.....WE HAVE INTEL THAT SUGGESTS KANADE-SAN HAS JOINED ARCANA.
GU (CLENCH)
TO-MOR-ROW ...
...I MUST AVENGE THE DISGRACE OF OUR LAST MEETING, OR ELSE...

PON
PON (PAT)


DON'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD.
WE'LL ALL DEAL WITH IT TOGETHER.

ALL RIGHT, THEN.
YOU'LL JOIN UNIT FIVE TOMORROW.
GA (GRAB)

... OKAY.

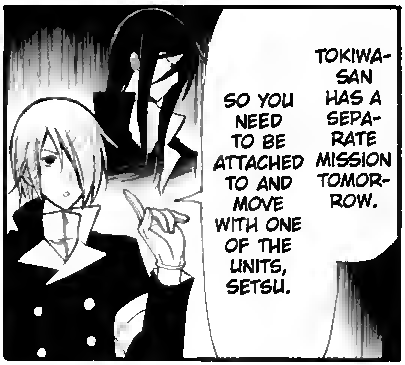
.....

SUCH DOCILE SPECIMENS ARE PRACTICALLY AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.
WASHI WASHI
WASHI (RUFFLE)
SO OBEDIENT.

HUH!?
WHY?
WHAT!?
NO WAY! YOU'D JUST USE HIM AS MANUAL LABOR!

UM... I ALWAYS STAY WITH TOKIWA-SAN, SO WHY WOULD I NOT BE WITH HIM TOMORROW TOO?
IT'S DIFFERENT THIS TIME!

SETSU...
KYURARARARA (SPARKLE)
...COME TO UNIT TWO! UNIT TWO!
KI (GLARE)
DON'T BE FOOLED. UNIT TWO IS FULL OF DISGUSTING PIGS.

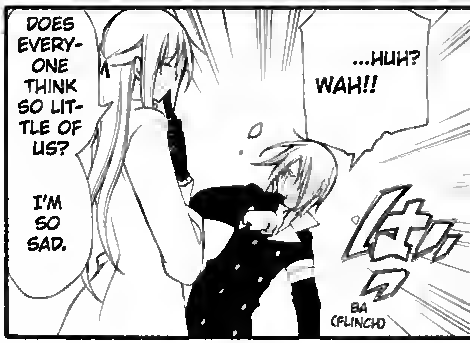

TOKIWA-SAN HAS A SEPA-RATE MISSION TOMOR-ROW.
SO YOU NEED TO BE ATTACHED TO AND MOVE WITH ONE OF THE UNITS, SETSU.

...AND SINCE UNITS THREE AND SIX ARE STILL SOMETHING OF A MESS WITHOUT NEW CAPTAINS...
...WE'D PREFER YOU CHOOSE ONE OF OUR UNITS.
AH... I SEE.

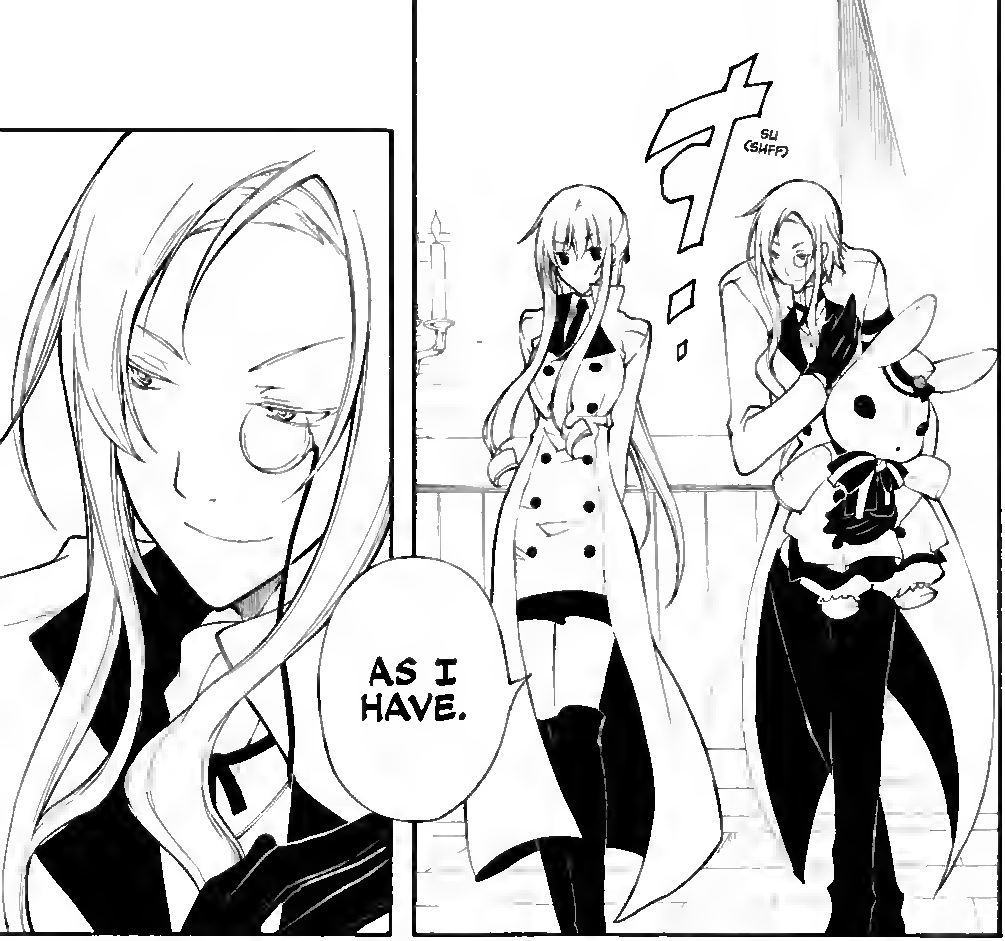
TO BE TOTALLY HONEST, YOU COULD ALSO PICK... UNIT FOUR, BUT...
...UNIT FOUR'S... WELL...

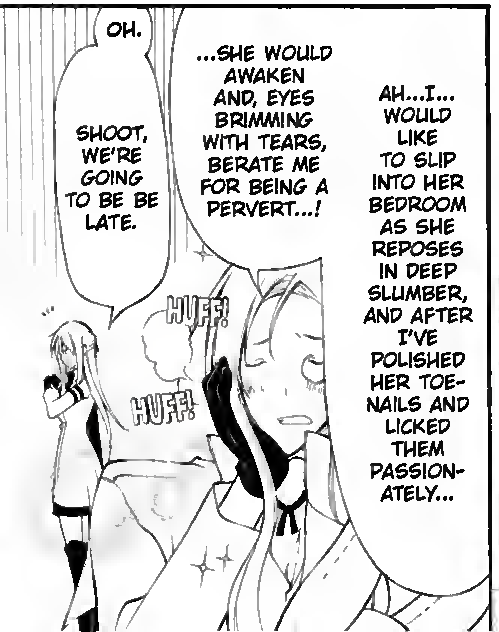
WHAT ABOUT UNIT FOUR?
HM?

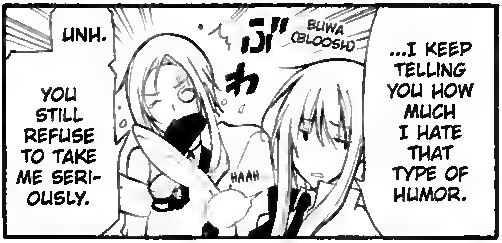
SETSU.
FORGET THEM. COME TO UNIT FOUR. WE'D WELCOME YOU.
HUH?
ER...
UM...

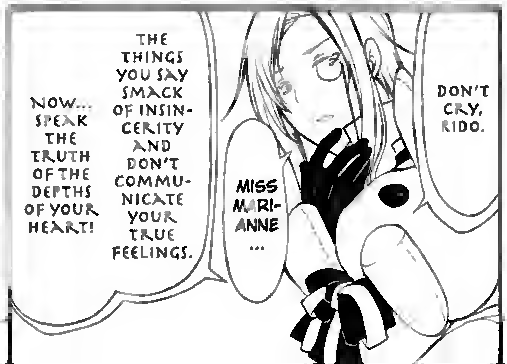

DOES EVERYONE THINK SO LITTLE OF US?
I'M SO SAD.
...HUH?
WAH!!
BA (FLINCH)

...GEH.
THEY'RE ALL TERRIBLY CONCERNED, YOU SEE.
...LADY TSUKIMIYA.
KATSU CHAO
THAT IF HE SERVED BESIDE ONE SO FAIR...
...EVEN THE MIGHTY SETSU WOULD FALL UNDER YOUR SPELL.
KATSU
KATSU


SU (SHFF)
AS I HAVE.

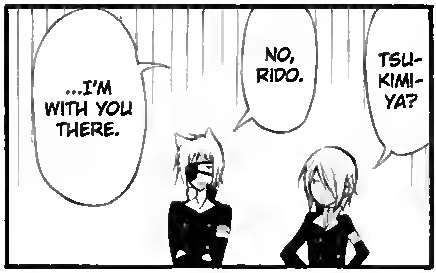

AH...I... WOULD LIKE TO SLIP INTO HER BEDROOM AS SHE REPOSES IN DEEP SLUMBER, AND AFTER I'VE POLISHED HER TOE-NAILS AND LICKED THEM PASSION-ATELY...
...SHE WOULD AWAKEN AND, EYES BRIMMING WITH TEARS, BERATE ME FOR BEING A PERVERT...!
OH.
SHOOT, WE'RE GOING TO BE BE LATE.
HUFF!
HUFF!


UNH.
YOU STILL REFUSE TO TAKE ME SERI-OUSLY.
BUWA (BLOOSH)
HAAH
...I KEEP TELLING YOU HOW MUCH I HATE THAT TYPE OF HUMOR.


NOW... SPEAK THE TRUTH OF THE DEPTHS OF YOUR HEART!
THE THINGS YOU SAY SMACK OF INSIN-CERITY AND DON'T COMMU-NICATE YOUR TRUE FEELINGS.
MISS MARI-ANNE ...
DON'T CRY, RIDO.

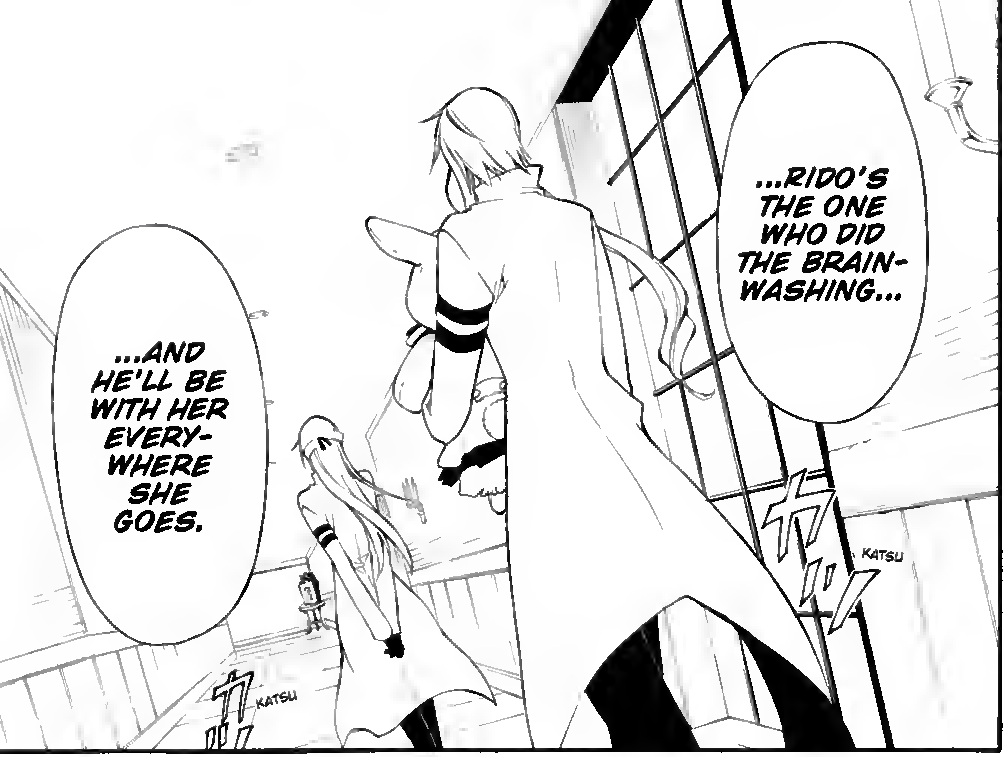
BOSO (MUTTER)
.....
I JUST CAN'T BRING MYSELF TO LIKE...

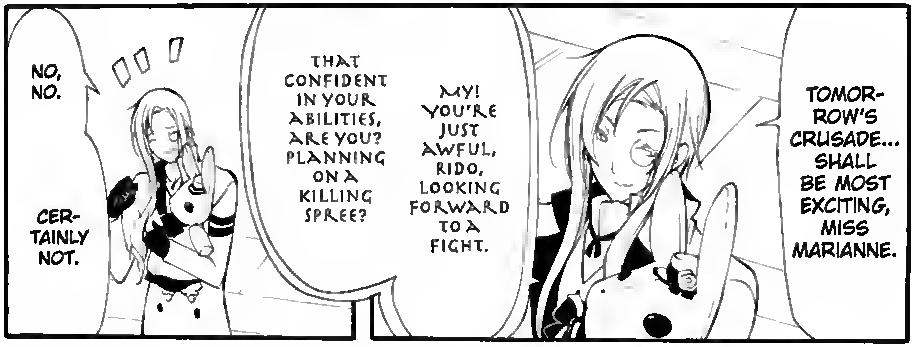
WELL ...
...I LOOK FORWARD TO TOMORROW'S ASSIGNMENTS.
PLEASE EXCUSE US, EVERYONE.
ADIEU.
PEKORI (BOW)
KATSU (TAK)
KATSU
KATSU

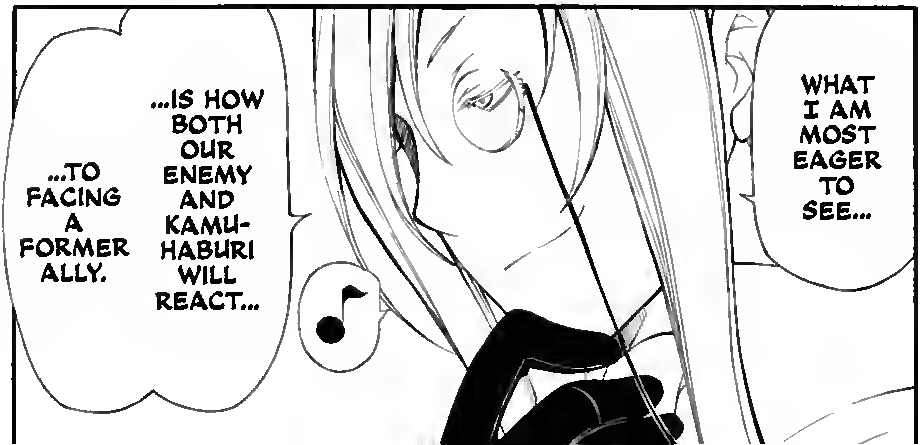

TSUKIMIYA?
NO, RIDO.
...I'M WITH YOU THERE.

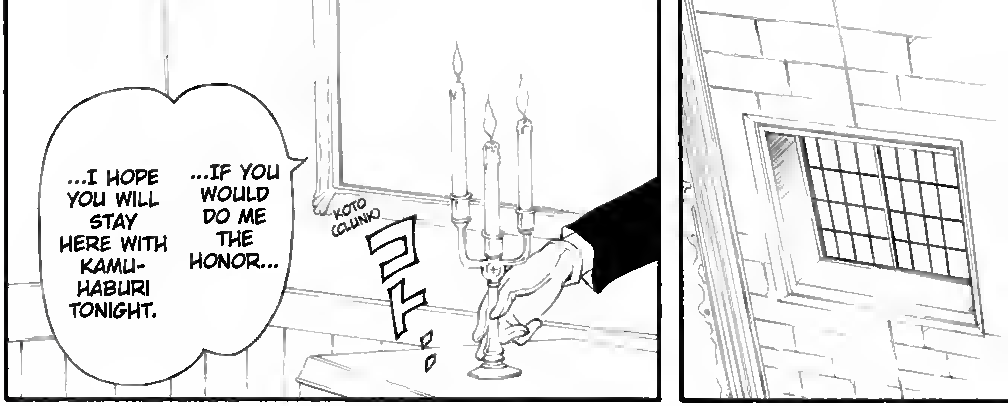
I FEEL SORRY FOR HER TOO.
FIRST SHE'S BRAINWASHED, THEN SHE'S MADE TO FIGHT HER FRIENDS.

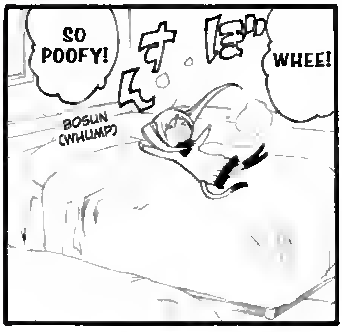
WHAT IF THE BRAINWASHING WEARS OFF DURING THE FIGHT?
I DON'T THINK THAT'S LIKELY.
AFTER ALL...

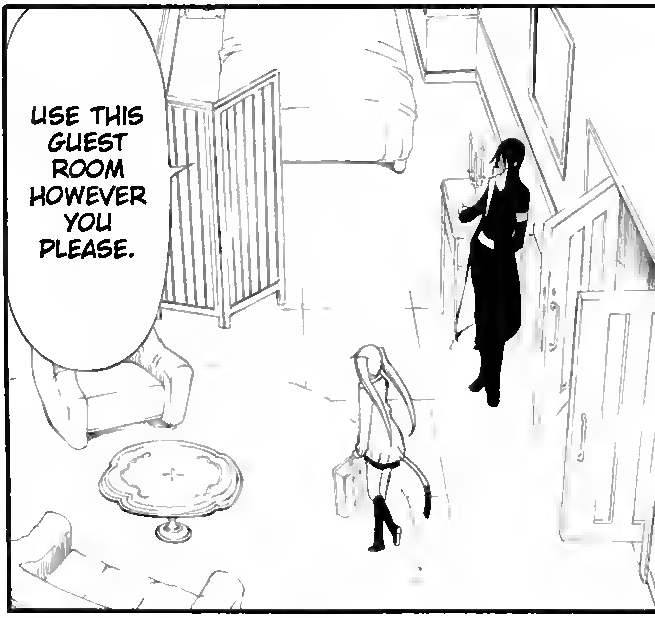

...RIDO'S THE ONE WHO DID THE BRAIN-WASHING...
KATSU
...AND HE'LL BE WITH HER EVERY-WHERE SHE GOES.
KATSU


TOMOR-ROW'S CRUSADE... SHALL BE MOST EXCITING, MISS MARIANNE.
MY! YOU'RE JUST AWFUL, RIDO, LOOKING FORWARD TO A FIGHT.
THAT CONFIDENT IN YOUR ABILITIES, ARE YOU? PLANNING ON A KILLING SPREE?
NO, NO.
CER-TAINLY NOT.


WHAT I AM MOST EAGER TO SEE...
...IS HOW BOTH OUR ENEMY AND KAMU-HABURI WILL REACT...
...TO FACING A FORMER ALLY.


...IF YOU WOULD DO ME THE HONOR...
...I HOPE YOU WILL STAY HERE WITH KAMU-HABURI TONIGHT.
KOTO (CLUNK)


SO POOFY!
WHEE!
BOSUN (WHUMP)

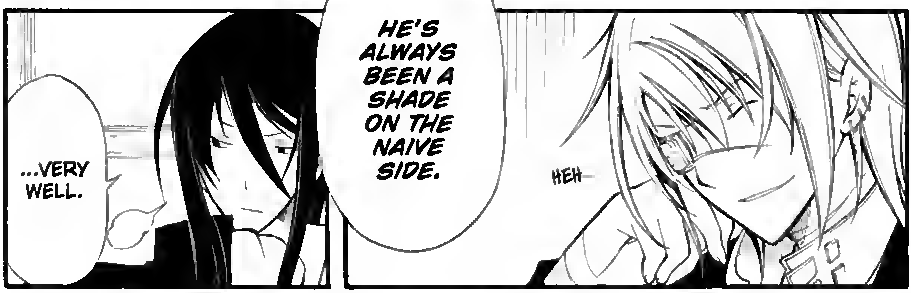

USE THIS GUEST ROOM HOWEVER YOU PLEASE.

BOSUN
BOSUN
THERE GOES THE MATTRESS.
...AH, ALSO ...
WHEE! WHEE!

SHOULD WE TAKE COUNTER-MEA-SURES?
GISHI (CREAK)

...TSUZUKI'S ATTENDANT AND ARCANA...
...WERE SEEN LURKING NEAR WHERE TOMORROW'S RELICS ARE TO EMERGE.

...
LEAVE IT BE.
MOST LIKELY... THEY'VE SET SOME USE-LESS TRAP.


...VERY WELL.
HE'S ALWAYS BEEN A SHADE ON THE NAIVE SIDE.
HEH

YOU SEEM CONFI-DENT IN YOUR PLAN...
WOULD YOU MIND SHARING IT WITH ME?
...TO ACQUIRE BOTH RELICS TOMOR-ROW.
KACHI CCLICK
THE RELICS AP-PEARING TOMOR-ROW...
...THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH OF THE CRUSADE ...

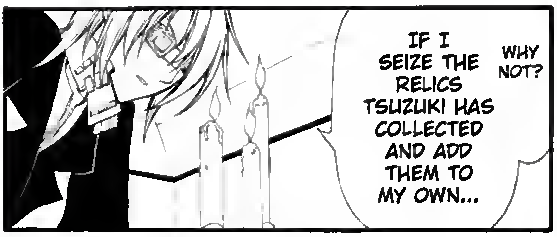
...BOTH OF THEM...
...ARE ALREADY IN MY POSSES-SION.
DO (BOOM)
WHAT ...!?
IT REALLY SHOULDN'T COME AS SUCH A SHOCK.
YOU MIGHT CALL IT "TAKING THE INITIA-TIVE."
SHOULDN'T COME AS A SHOCK, YOU SAY...
BUT HOW'D YOU OBTAIN THEM?
I'D LIKE TO KNOW, AS AN OVERSEER OF THE CRUSADES.

IT WASN'T TOO DIFFICULT... THE FIFTH RELIC, CHOKHMAH, FORETELLS WHICH RELICS WILL APPEAR NEXT.
EAT
SO I TOOK THE SECOND RELIC, DA'AT, THE BOOK I'D DEFILED...
...AND USED IT AS BAIT TO CALL FORTH SIX AND SEVEN.
ANY PROB-LEM?
...WHAT A FRIGHT-ENING ABILITY.
A NUMBERED RELIC HAS NEVER BEEN FORCIBLY SUMMONED BEFORE.
OOH, CANDY!
IF THE CRUSADES WERE THAT SENSITIVE, I'D WANT NO PART IN THEM.
WHAT IF YOU'VE IRREPARABLY WARPED THE PROGRES-SION OF THE CRUSADES?
...BUT YOU NEEDN'T WORRY. THERE'S BEEN NO EFFECT.
RIGHT ON SCHEDULE, AN ORACLE WAS DELIVERED AUTOMATI-CALLY TO THE GOD CANDI-DATES AS USUAL...
...EVEN THOUGH THE RELICS...
...HAD BEEN STOLEN.

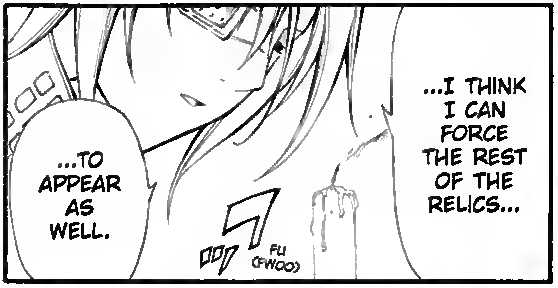
JUST...
...A FATAL TRAP...

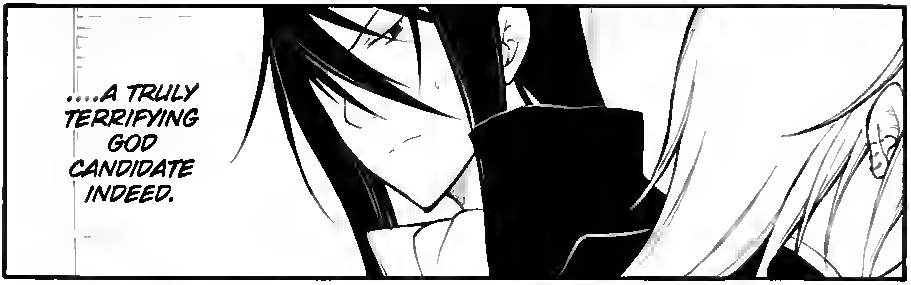
IF TSUZUKI'S LACKEYS WERE SKULKING THERE...
...IT MEANS HE'LL DEFINITELY BE THERE TOMORROW.
BUT...
...THERE WON'T BE ANY RELICS.

ONE THAT I SET PERSONALLY.
HIS OWN PRIVATE EXECUTION SITE.


IF I SEIZE THE RELICS TSUZUKI HAS COLLECTED AND ADD THEM TO MY OWN...
WHY NOT?

...
IF YOU KILL TSUZUKI...
...FURTHER CRUSADES MAY NOT MATERIALIZE.

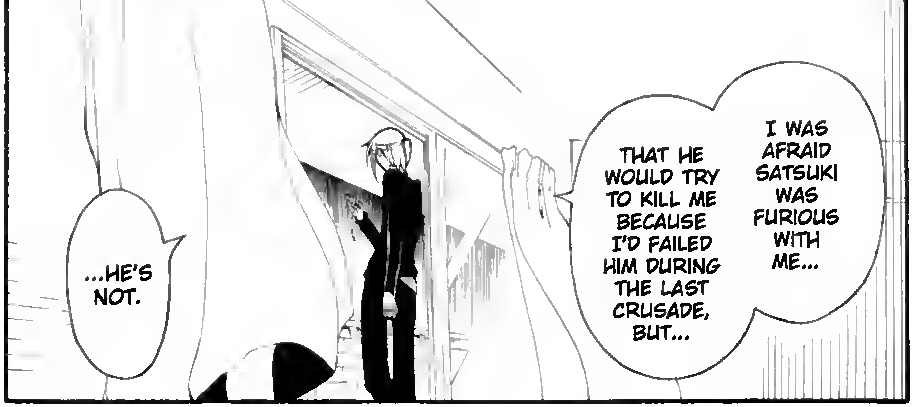

...I THINK I CAN FORCE THE REST OF THE RELICS...
FU (FWOO)
...TO APPEAR AS WELL.

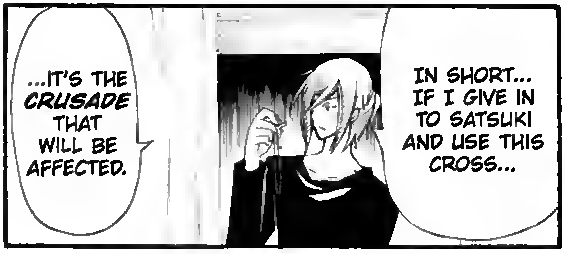

....A TRULY TERRIFYING GOD CANDIDATE INDEED.

...I'VE FINALLY MANAGED TO SET THE STAGE FOR TSUZUKI'S DEATH.
HE MEANS TO MANIPULATE THE VERY CRUSADES.

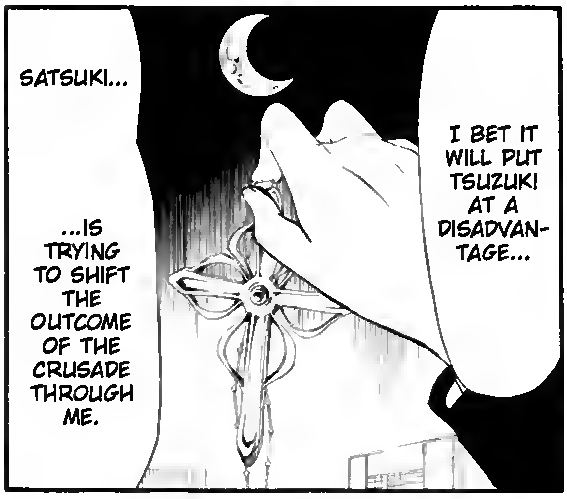
DON'T GET IN MY WAY...
...KAMU-HABURI.
HEE!
MOLE... HUH.
だきっ
DAKI (HUG)
AND WE'VE GIVEN THE MOLE HIS BAIT TOO.
NOW ...
...WE MUST WAIT AND SEE IF THAT MOLE ACTS IN OUR FAVOR AND TAKES A BITE.

...UGH. GRILLED-MEAT STENCH.
カラ (SLIDE)
UNH... THESE CURTAINS REEK...
むわぁ (WAFT)
PLUS ...
...THEY LEFT WITHOUT CLEANING UP.
GOCHA (BLRSH)
ゴちゃ
OH, SORRY
WE GOTTA RUN, SO THANKS
THOSE JERKS ...
CHARI (CLINK)
HAAH ...
YOU CAN'T MESS WITH DIVINE POWER!
AT LEAST, NOT UNTIL ONE BECOMES THE TRUE GOD.
THAT GOES FOR BOTH ME OR SATSUKI.
ONE THING...
...IS CLEAR.


I WAS AFRAID SATSUKI WAS FURIOUS WITH ME...
THAT HE WOULD TRY TO KILL ME BECAUSE I'D FAILED HIM DURING THE LAST CRUSADE, BUT...
...HE'S NOT.


IN SHORT... IF I GIVE IN TO SATSUKI AND USE THIS CROSS...
...IT'S THE *CRUSADE* THAT WILL BE AFFECTED.

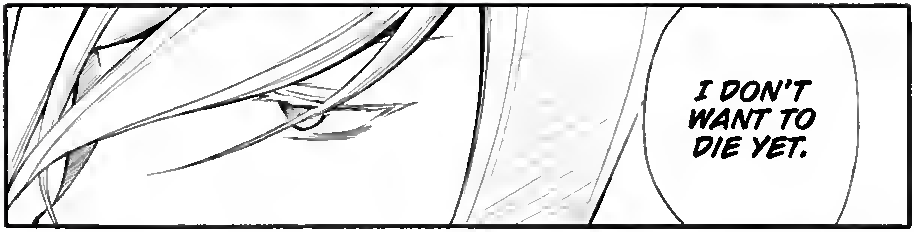
JUST LIKE TSUZUKI...
...HE'S NOT CONCERNED WITH MY LIFE.
HIS SOLE FOCUS IS THE OUTCOME OF THE CRUSADE.

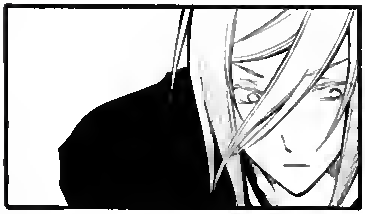

I BET IT WILL PUT TSUZUKI AT A DISADVANTAGE...
SATSUKI...
...IS TRYING TO SHIFT THE OUTCOME OF THE CRUSADE THROUGH ME.

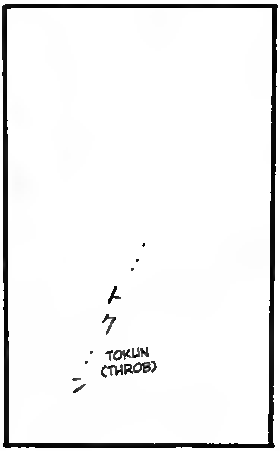
...I'M SUCH A...
... LOSER.

TSUZU (SLIDE)

EVEN THOUGH... I KNOW ALL THIS...
...I CAN'T TURN IT DOWN.


I DON'T WANT TO DIE YET.




トク
TOKUN (THROB)

TOKUN
THE... CURSE MARK?
TOKUN
TOKUN
TOKUN
トクン
トクン

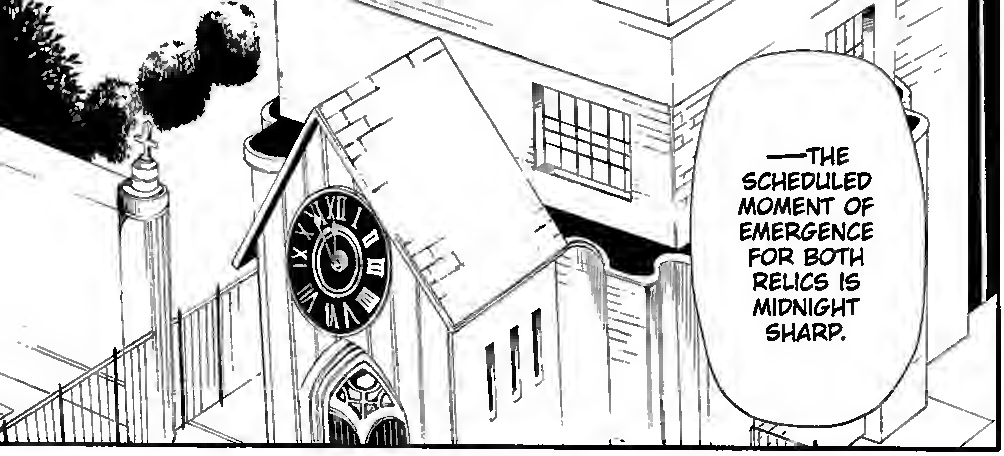
VVN (THROB)
DOKU
GH...
AH!!
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
GGH ...!
THE CURSE ..... FITS.
DOSU (THUD)
DOKUN

DOKUN

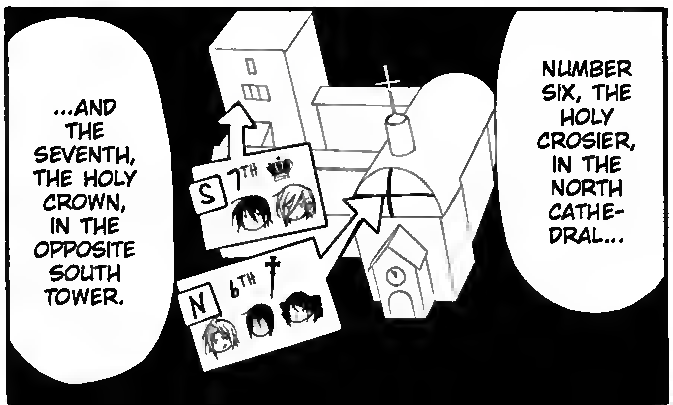
DOKUN
... HAFF ...
... HUFF ...
DOKUN

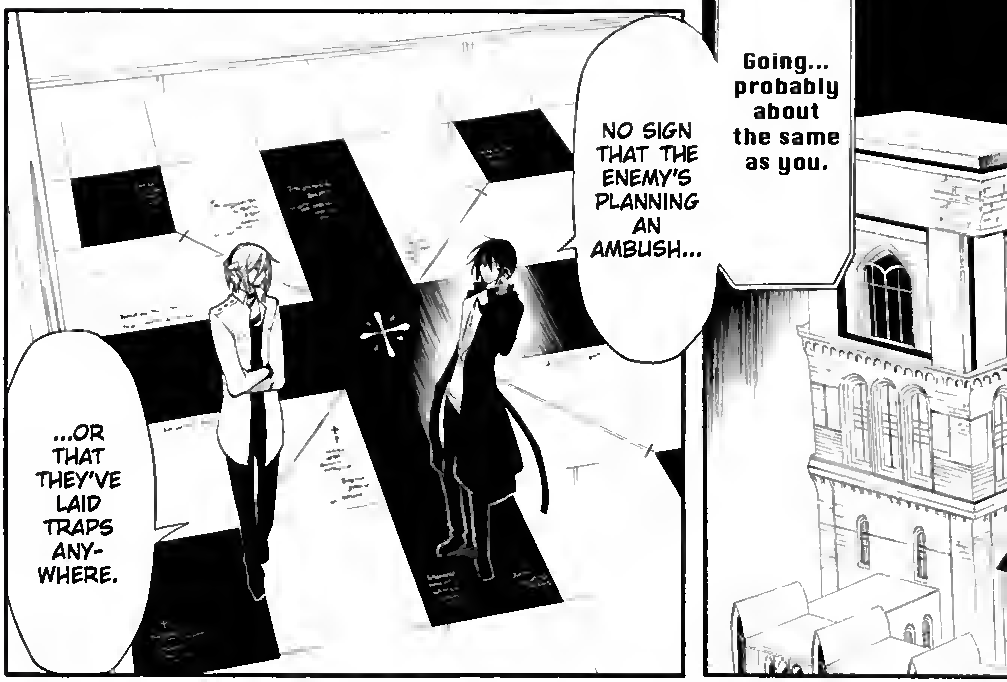
BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

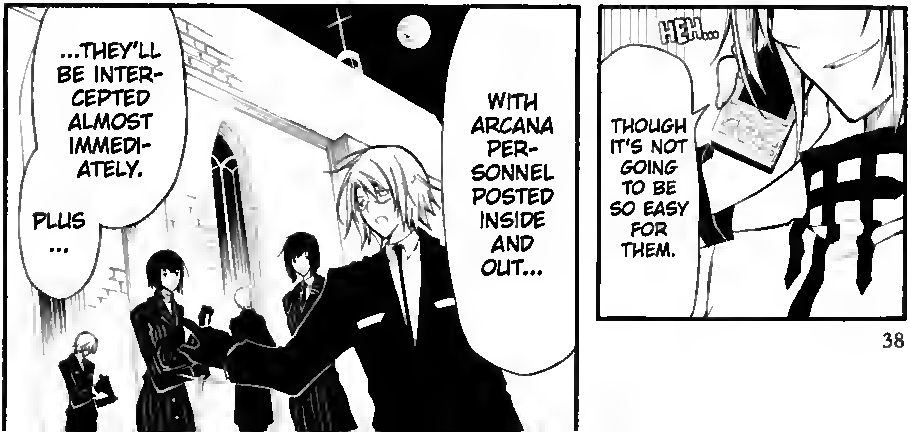


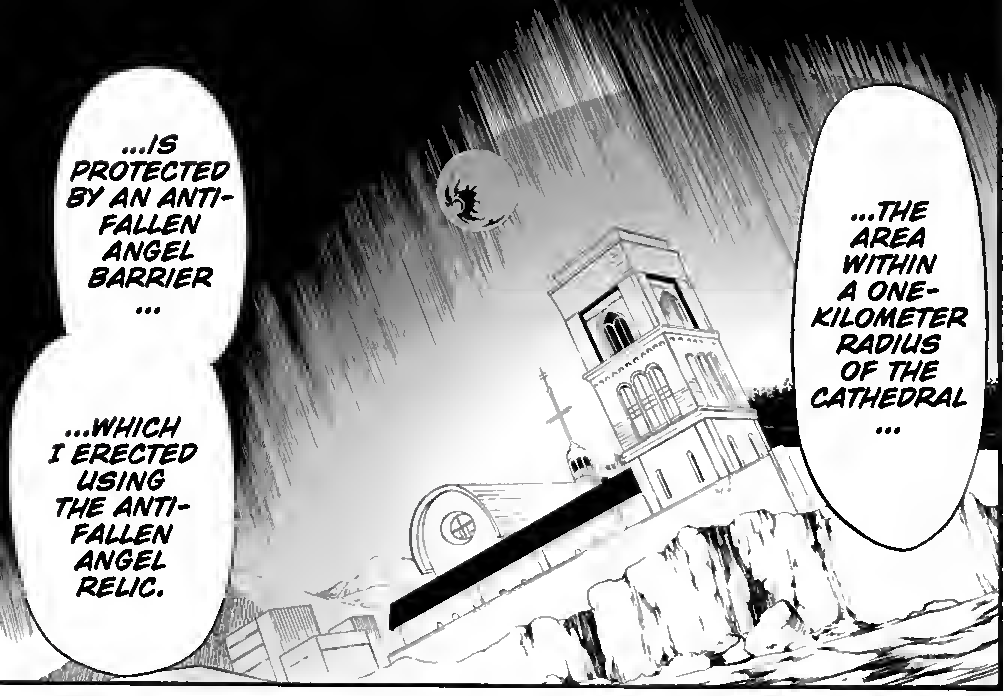
Chapter 37
A Hollow Heart




Going... probably about the same as you.
NO SIGN THAT THE ENEMY'S PLANNING AN AMBUSH...
...OR THAT THEY'VE LAID TRAPS ANY-WHERE.

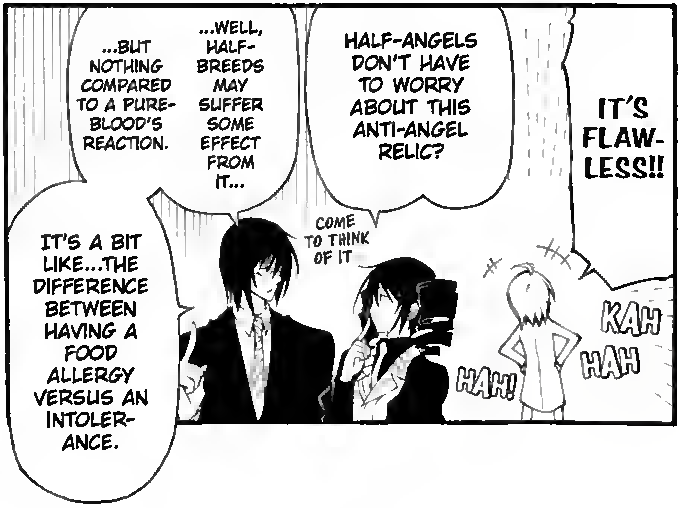
DO THEY INTEND TO FIGHT AT ALL?
Hmph, well, we did occupy the emergence points first, so...
...more than likely they plan to snatch 'em from us after we've grabbed them.

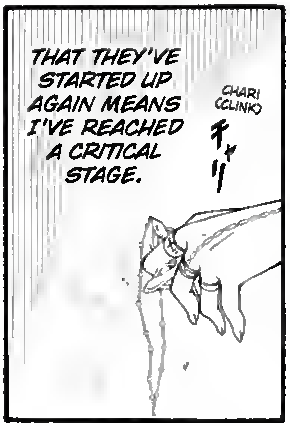

WITH ARCANA PER-SONNEL POSTED INSIDE AND OUT...
...THEY'LL BE INTER-CEPTED ALMOST IMMEDI-ATELY.
PLUS ...
HEH...
THOUGH IT'S NOT GOING TO BE SO EASY FOR THEM.

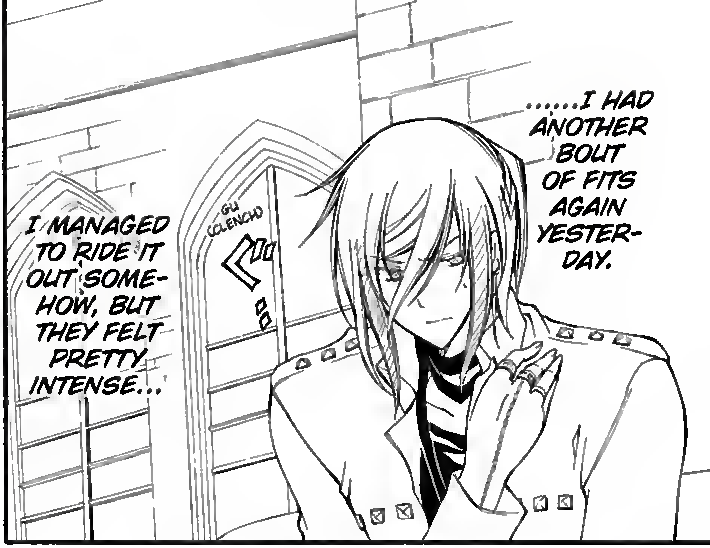

...THE AREA WITHIN A ONE-KILOMETER RADIUS OF THE CATHEDRAL ...
...IS PROTECTED BY AN ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER ...
...WHICH I ERECTED USING THE ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL RELIC.

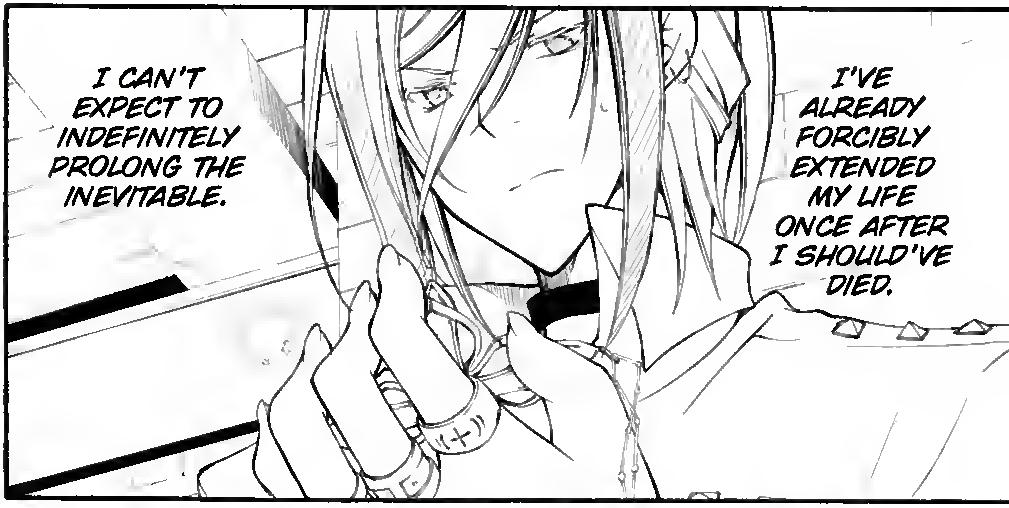
FURTHER-MORE, IN CASE KAMU-HABURI TRIES TO USE THEIR ANTI-ANGEL RELIC...
...I'M WEARING A SPELL TOOL THAT WILL SUPPRESS ITS EFFECTS.
..... HEH... HEH HEH.

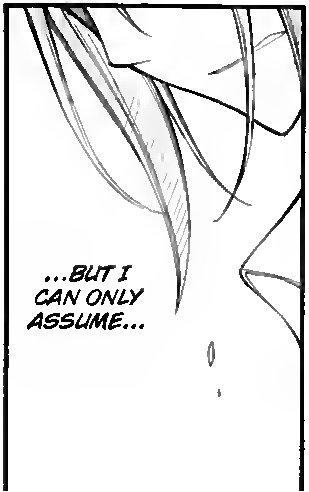
Ah... I see.
.....

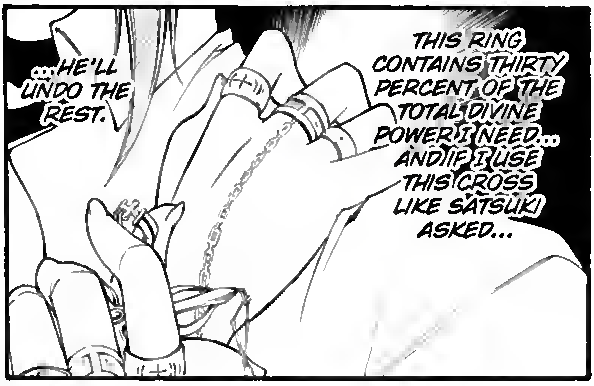

IT'S FLAW-LESS!!
HALF-ANGELS DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT THIS ANTI-ANGEL RELIC?
COME TO THINK OF IT
...WELL, HALF-BREEDS MAY SUFFER SOME EFFECT FROM IT...
...BUT NOTHING COMPARED TO A PURE-BLOOD'S REACTION.
IT'S A BIT LIKE...THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING A FOOD ALLERGY VERSUS AN INTOLER-ANCE.
KAH HAH
HAH!


THAT THEY'VE STARTED UP AGAIN MEANS I'VE REACHED A CRITICAL STAGE.
CHARI (CLINK)

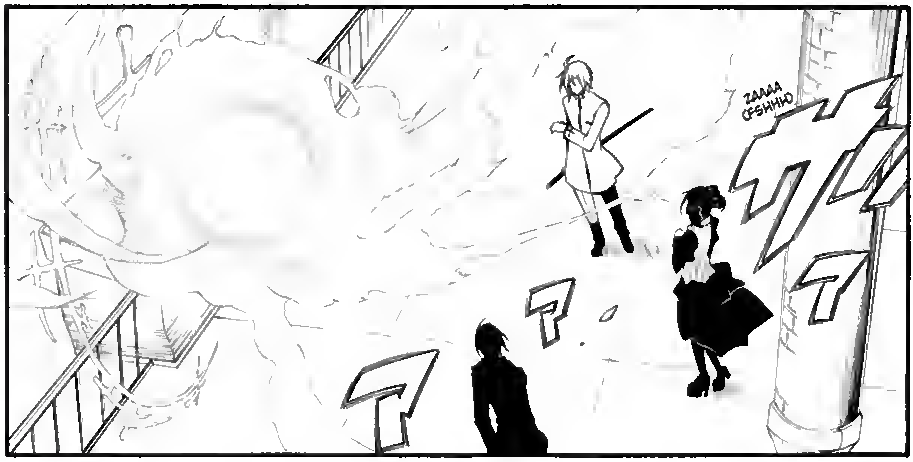

I MANAGED TO RIDE IT OUT SOMEHOW, BUT THEY FELT PRETTY INTENSE...
GU (CLENCH)
.....I HAD ANOTHER BOUT OF FITS AGAIN YESTERDAY.

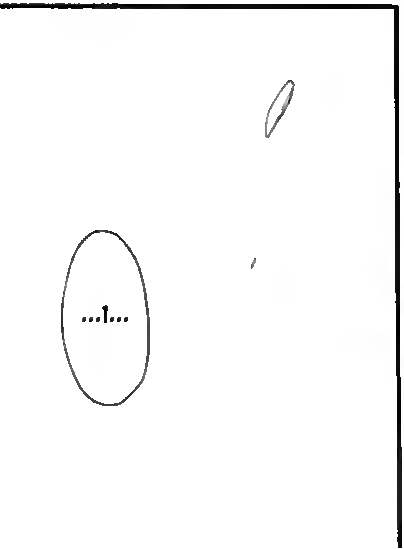

I CAN'T EXPECT TO INDEFINITELY PROLONG THE INEVITABLE.
I'VE ALREADY FORCIBLY EXTENDED MY LIFE ONCE AFTER I SHOULD'VE DIED.


...BUT I CAN ONLY ASSUME...


...HE'LL UNDO THE REST.
THIS RING CONTAINS THIRTY PERCENT OF THE TOTAL DIVINE POWER I NEED... AND IF I USE THIS CROSS LIKE SATSUKI ASKED...

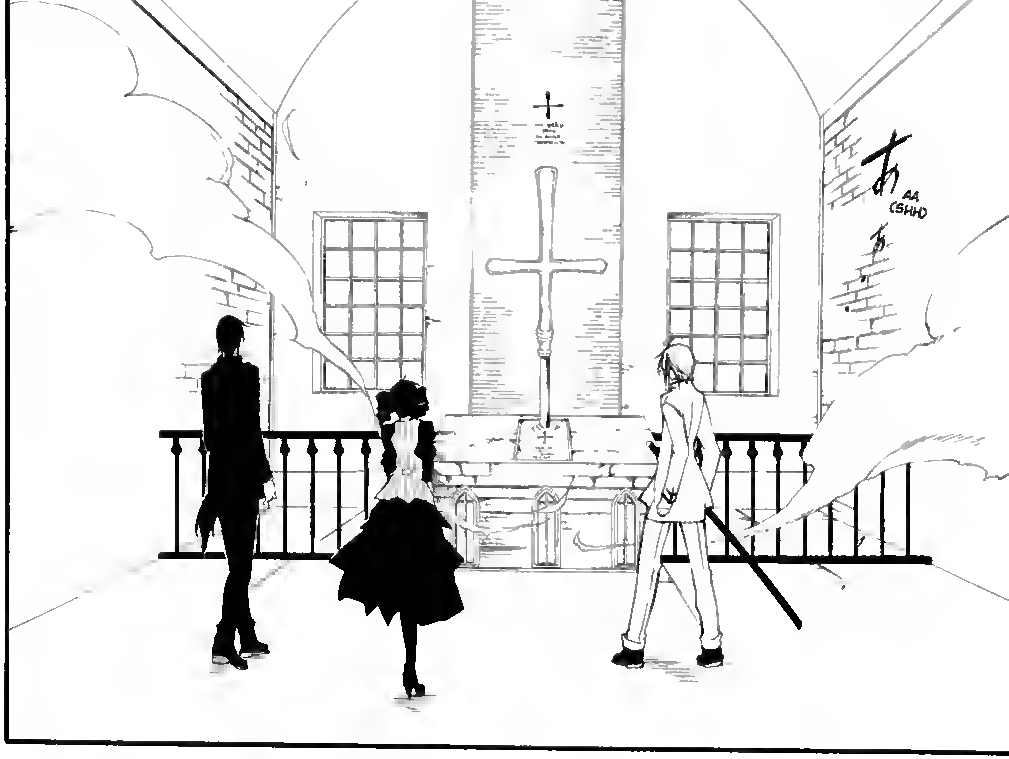
...THE POWER IS ONLY BEING OFFERED AT THE COST OF PUTTING TSUZUKI AT A DISADVANTAGE...!
...OH, IT'S ALMOST TIME.
THE RELICS ARE GOING TO APPEAR ANY SECOND.
POU (GLOW)

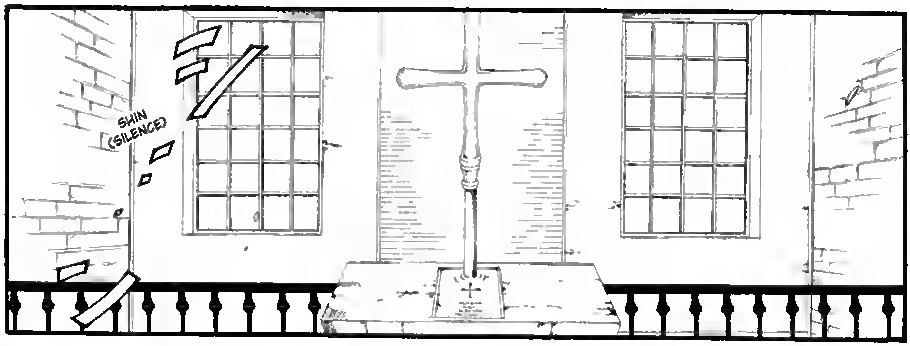

ZAAAA (FSHHH)


...1...

... 3 ...
AAA
... 2...

AAA (SHHH)
MID-NIGHT SHARP IN...
...5... 4...


AA (SHHO


SHIN (SILENCE)

DON'T BE STU-PID...!
SOME SORT OF MALFUNC-TION?
?
BA (FWP)
SIGH
Hey...
...noth-ing's show-ing up.

.....
HM?

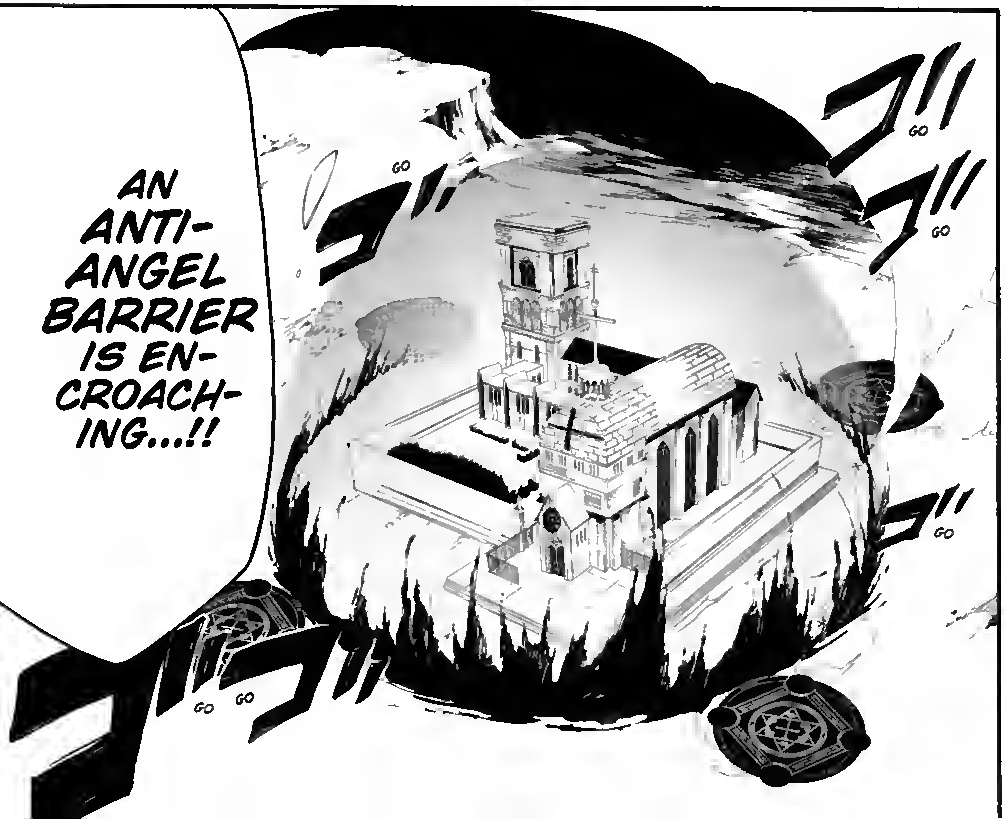
GA (CLUNG)
WHY!?
I'VE NEVER HEARD OF CRUSADE RELICS NOT MATERIAL-IZING!
KASA (RUSTLE)
A BLACK FEATH-ER...?
!
...DON'T TELL ME...
...IT'S NOT THAT THE RELICS AREN'T EMERGING ...
...IT'S THAT...
...THEY'VE ALREADY BEEN TAKEN...?

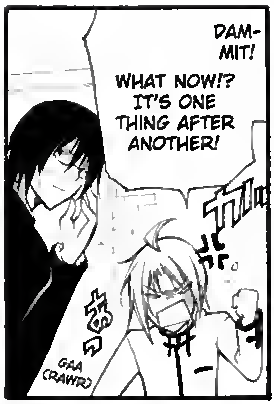
KOO (WHOOM)
NH ...!!
BACHI (CRACKLE)
OUT-SIDE THE BARRIER ...
WHAT THE...!?
BLACK MAGIC ARRAYS ...?

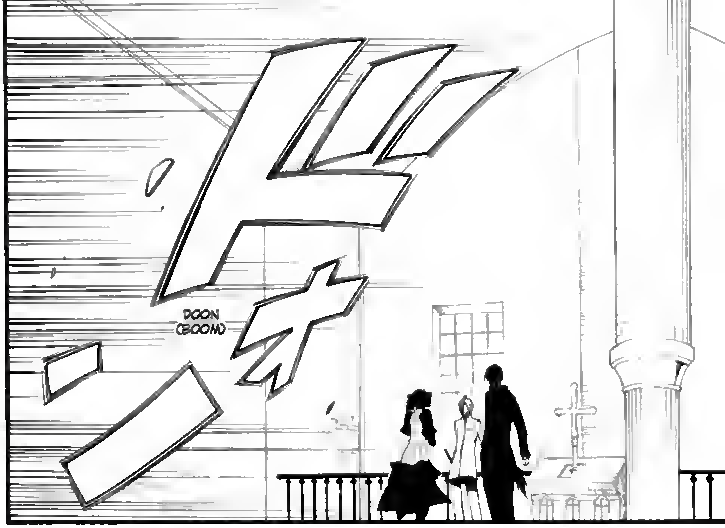
DAM-MIT...!
WHAT THE HECK!?

WHAT IS IT?
PARI
PARI (PZZL)
IT'S... TAINT.

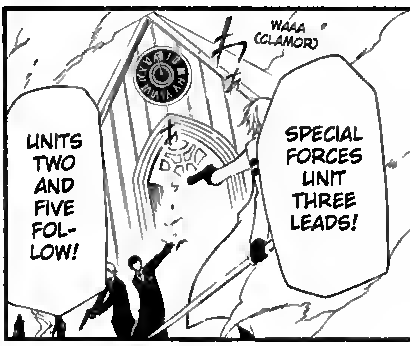
GO
... STRONG ANTI-ANGEL POWER...
NO...
GO (RMBL)
FROM OUTSIDE THE FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER I ERECTED...

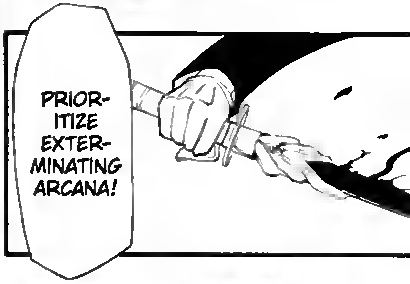

AN ANTI-ANGEL BARRIER IS EN-CROACH-ING...!!
GO

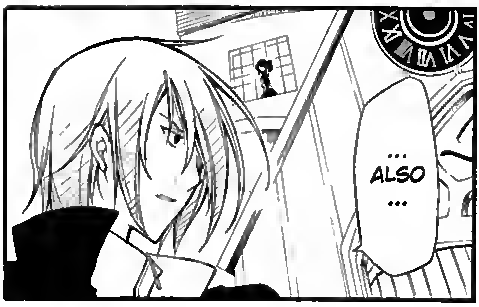

DAM-MIT!
WHAT NOW!? IT'S ONE THING AFTER ANOTHER!
GAA (RAWR)


DOON (BOOM)

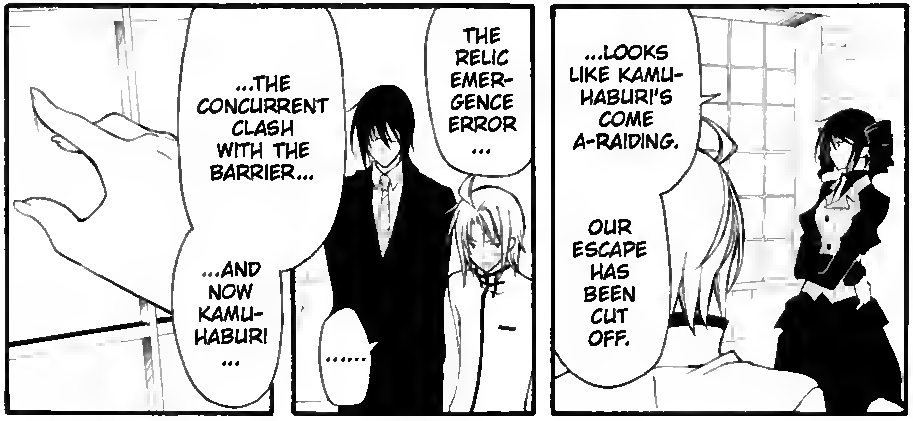
OUR ORDERS ARE TO WIPE THEM OUT BEFORE THIS CRUSADE IS THROUGH!


WAAA (CLAMOR)
UNITS TWO AND FIVE FOL-LOW!
SPECIAL FORCES UNIT THREE LEADS!


PRIOR-ITIZE EXTER-MINATING ARCANA!

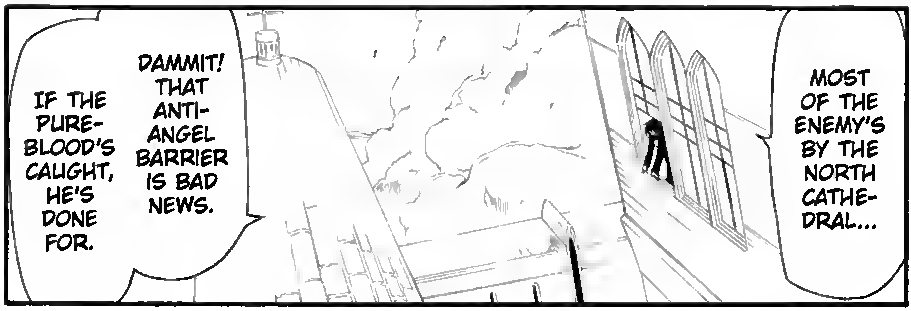

... ALSO ...

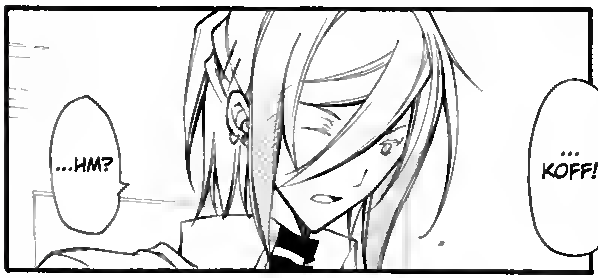
...DON'T FORGET TO DEAL WITH THE TRAITOR TOO.


...LOOKS LIKE KAMU-HABURI'S COME A-RAIDING.
OUR ESCAPE HAS BEEN CUT OFF.
THE RELIC EMER-GENCE ERROR ...
.....
...THE CONCURRENT CLASH WITH THE BARRIER...
...AND NOW KAMU-HABURI ...

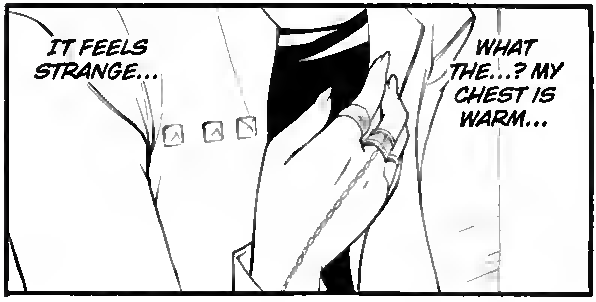
IT APPEARS WE'VE ALL BEEN SET UP...
...AND TRAPPED.

TCH ...!
IT'S NO USE! I CAN'T REESTABLISH CONTACT WITH THE PUREBLOOD!


MOST OF THE ENEMY'S BY THE NORTH CATHEDRAL...
DAMMIT! THAT ANTI-ANGEL BARRIER IS BAD NEWS.
IF THE PURE-BLOOD'S CAUGHT, HE'S DONE FOR.


...HM?

I'LL MAKE AN EXIT FOR HIM BEFORE WE RUN.
HEY! YOU HELP OUT TOO!
ALL RIGHT.
... KOFF!


IT FEELS STRANGE...
WHAT THE...? MY CHEST IS WARM...

...
NH!
DOKUN (THROB)
DO (THD)
HAGK ...!
HN?
HEY!
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
...! IS IT THE CURSE?
SHUT ...UP.
YOU COULDN'T HAVE PICKED A WORSE TIME! DON'T YOU DARE BE HAVING FITS RIGHT NOW!
I'LL TRY TO REPRESS THEM A LITTLE.
KOO (FWSH)
ACTI-VATE!
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
DOKUN
HIPP!

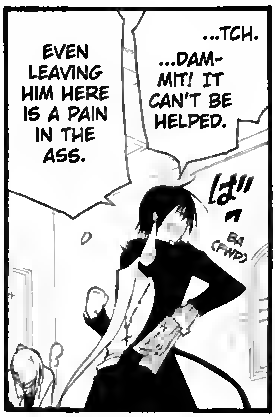
HE'S ALREADY PAST THE FINAL STAGES...
AH, I SEE, HE'S—

THEY'RE NOT EASING UP AT ALL.
HUH ...?

OH!
WHY ...?

LET'S GO!
WE'LL HOP OUTSIDE THE BARRIER TO DROP YOU OFF.
ZAAAAA (WHOOSH)

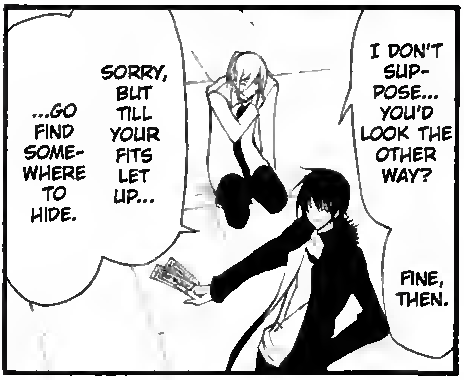
...

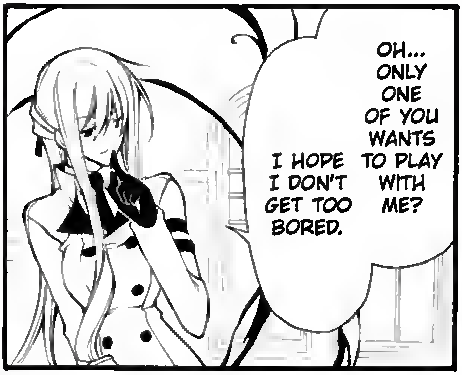

...TCH.
...DAMMIT! IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
EVEN LEAVING HIM HERE IS A PAIN IN THE ASS.
BA (PWD)

CON-VEY!!

I'M NOT LETTING YOU GO.
...IT'S NO GOOD.
ZAAAA (FZZL)
WHA ...!?
BYU (ZWAP)
KATSU (TAK)
EVE-NING.
LONG TIME NO SEE.

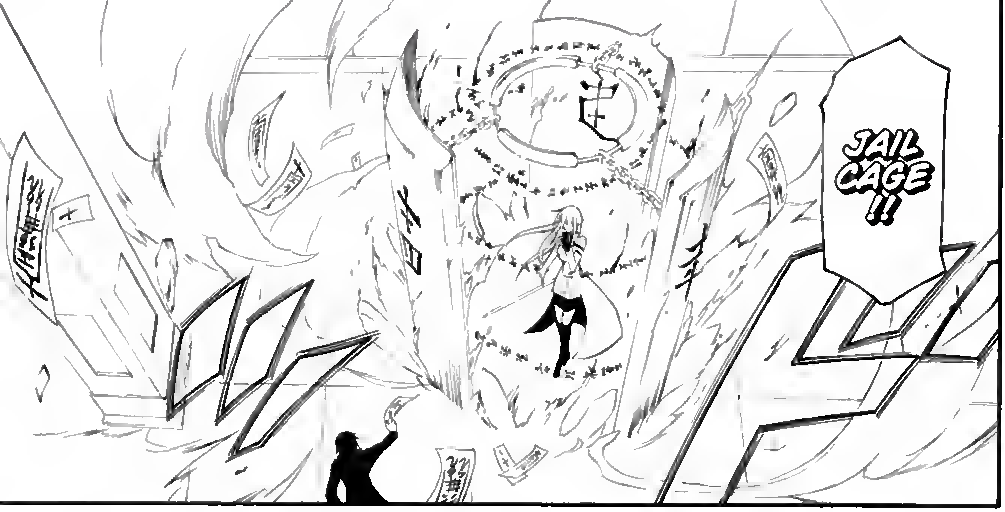
TSUKI-
MIYA...!


I DON'T SUP-
POSE... YOU'D
LOOK THE
OTHER
WAY?
FINE,
THEN.
SORRY,
BUT
TILL
YOUR
FITS
LET
UP...
...GO
FIND
SOME-
WHERE
TO
HIDE.


OH...
ONLY
ONE
OF YOU
WANTS
TO PLAY
WITH
ME?
I HOPE
I DON'T
GET TOO
BORED.

SHALL
WE
PICK UP
WHERE
WE LEFT
OFF?

ふ
ゴM


JAIL CAGE !!

KATSU (TAK)
...OH?

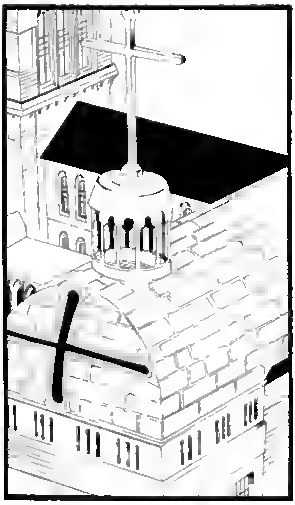
I'LL END THIS BEFORE YOU HAVE TIME FOR THAT.
DON'T WORRY.

THAT WAS MY SPECIAL CAGE!
...!
AND SHE SLIPPED IT EASILY!
DAM-MIT!
I CAN'T BE-LIEVE IT!
YOU DON'T WANNA GET CAUGHT.
...THAT'S RIGHT YOU BETTER RUN LIKE THE WIND.

TO (HUG)
IS TONIGHT'S GAME TAG?
FUN.

FIRST, I'LL UNDO THAT JOKE OF A BRAIN-WASHING JOB AND GIVE YOU A STERN LECTURE!
AND ONCE YOUR GRATITUDE HAS REACHED A CLIMAX...
...I SHALL TREAT MYSELF TO YOUR THANKS .....!!

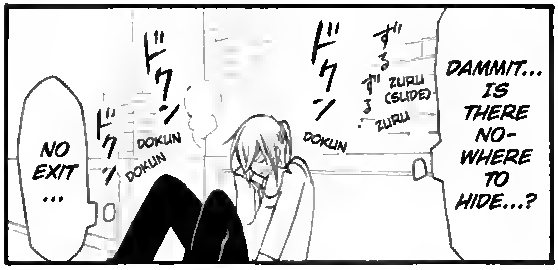
... HFF ...
HKH... NH!
DOSHA (SPLAT)

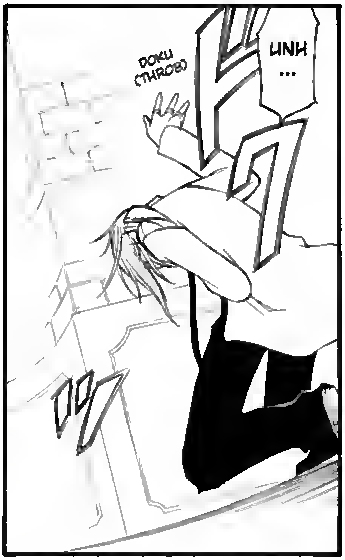


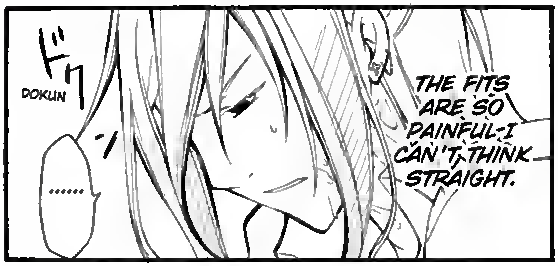
I'M FIIINE!!
TRYING TO FIGHT WHILE SUP-PRESS-ING THE BARRIER IS—
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

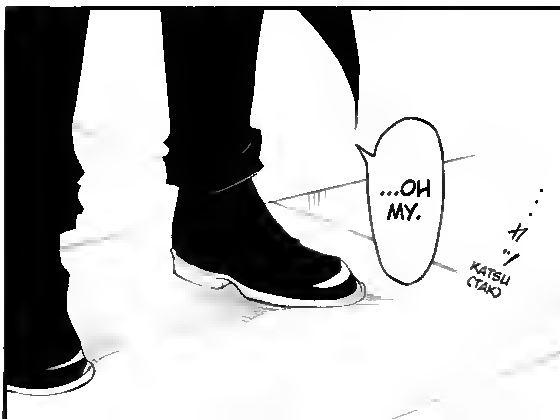
BUT I CAN'T HOLD IT OFF FOR-EVER.
WE NEED TO GET OUT AND REGROUP BEFORE MY ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER IS COMPLETELY DEVOURED...
...AND BECOMES AN ANTI-ANGEL BARRIER INSTEAD.

HEY!
BUN
BUN (SLASH)
SHOW THE RESPECT THAT IS DUE A GOD CANDIDATE, KAMU-HABURI!
OH, THANK YOU FOR BACKING ME UP.
THEY'RE BEING ESPECIALLY NASTY TO ME.
I'M SCARED.
GIRI (GRIT)
.....IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO END THE FIGHT QUICKLY BECAUSE OF THOSE TWO KAMU-HABURI OFFI-CERS..
...BUT THIS SPACE IS TOO TIGHT FOR SO MANY TROOPS TO MOVE AROUND IN FREELY.
VICTORY IS NOT IMPOSSIBLE FOR US.



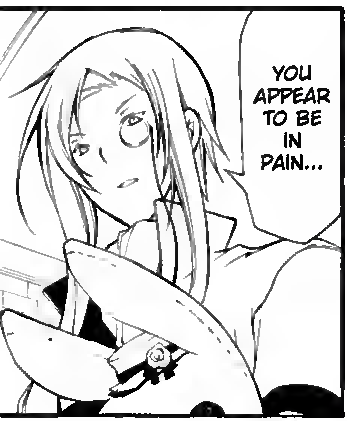


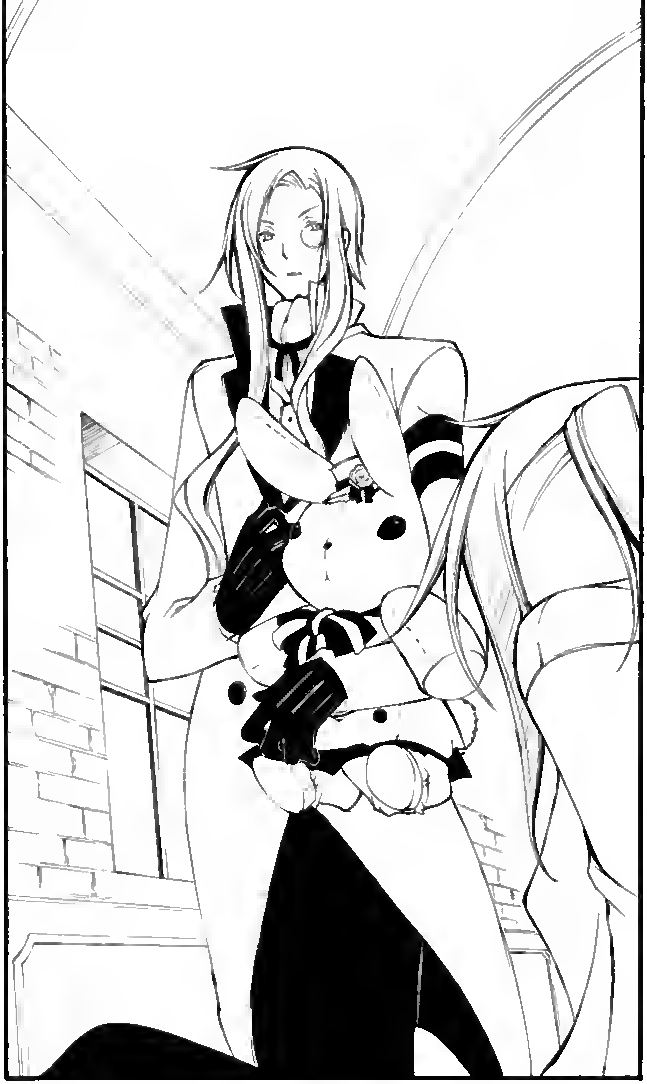


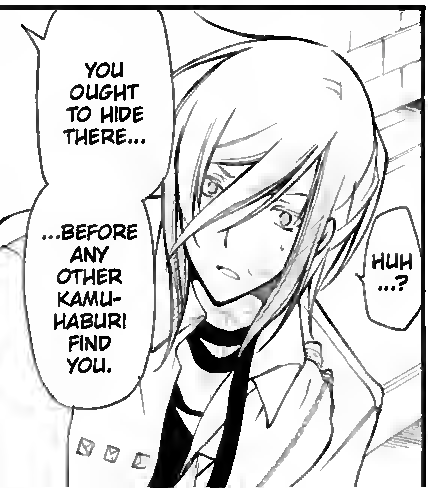


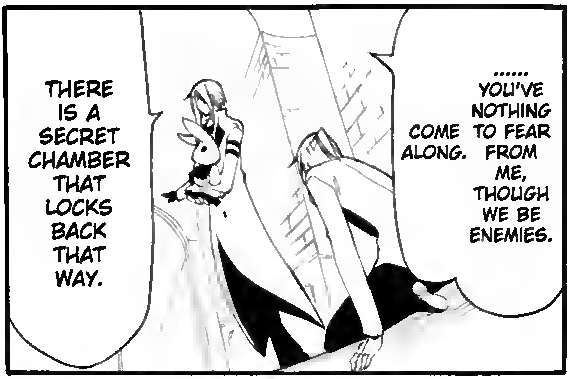
COULD THIS REALLY BE IT...

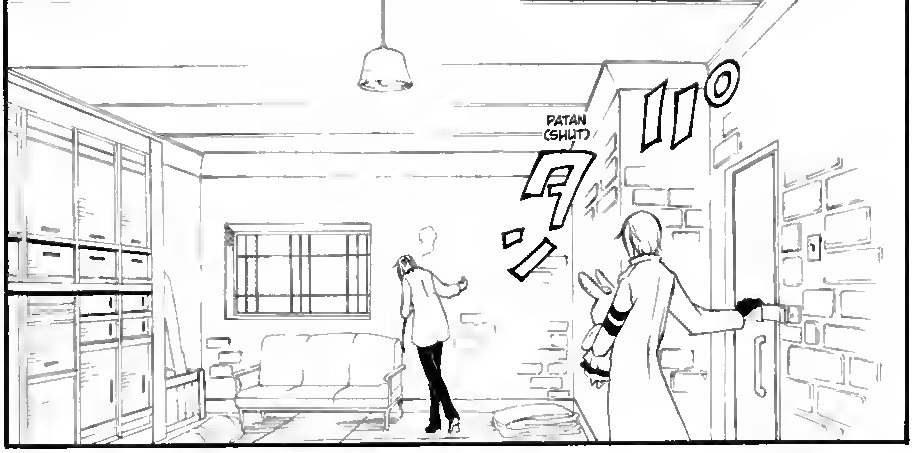
...!

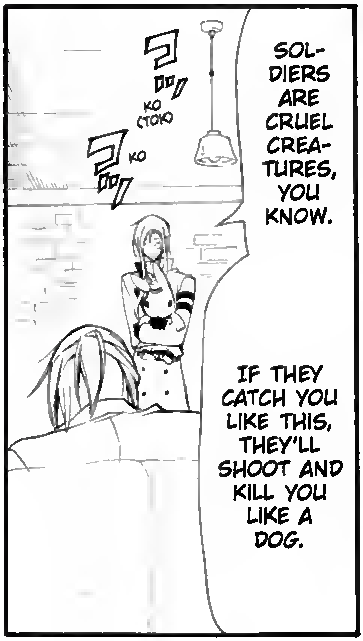

YOU APPEAR TO BE IN PAIN...

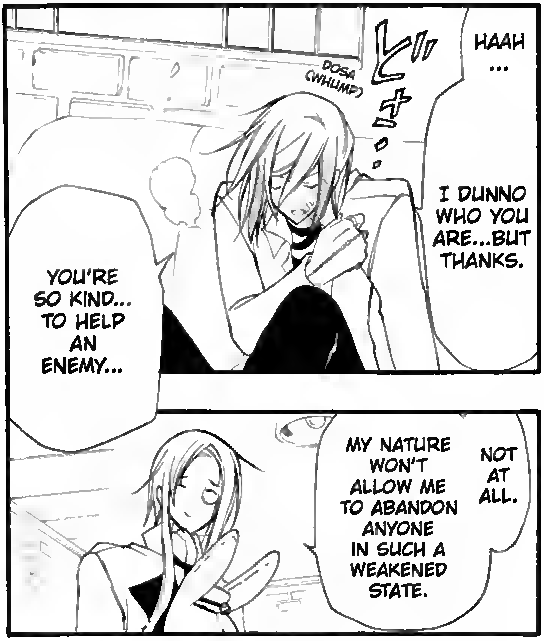


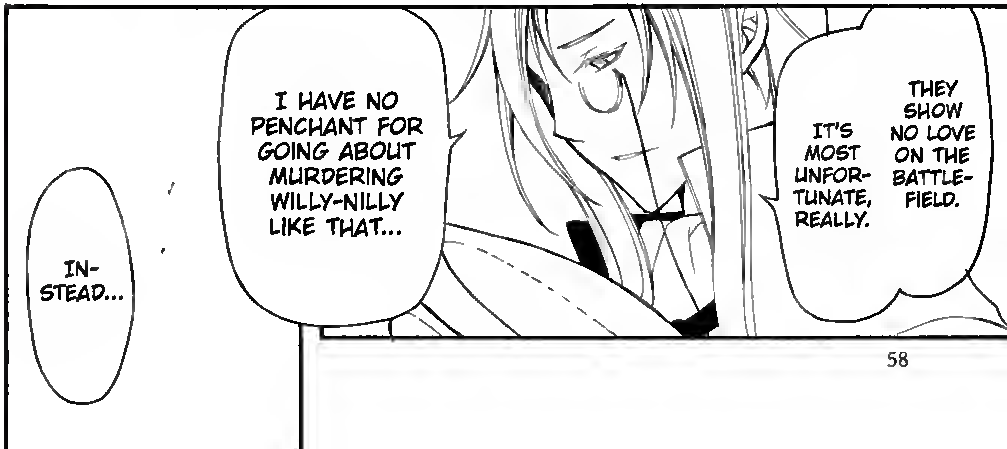

YOU OUGHT TO HIDE THERE...
...BEFORE ANY OTHER KAMU-HABURI FIND YOU.
HUH ...?


THERE IS A SECRET CHAMBER THAT LOCKS BACK THAT WAY.
COME ALONG.
..... YOU'VE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM ME, THOUGH WE BE ENEMIES.

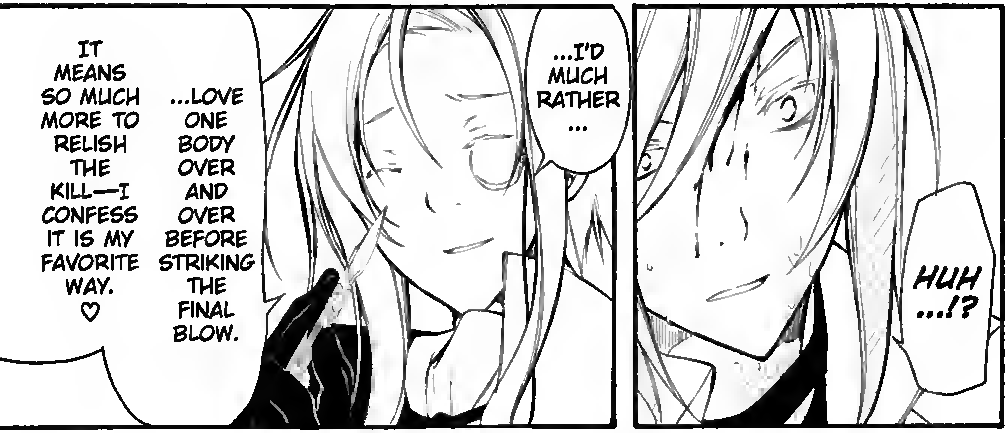

PATAN (SHUT)

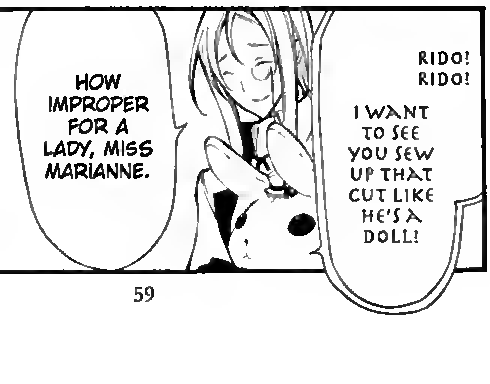

KO (TOK)
KO
SOL-DIERS ARE CRUEL CREA-TURES, YOU KNOW.
IF THEY CATCH YOU LIKE THIS, THEY'LL SHOOT AND KILL YOU LIKE A DOG.

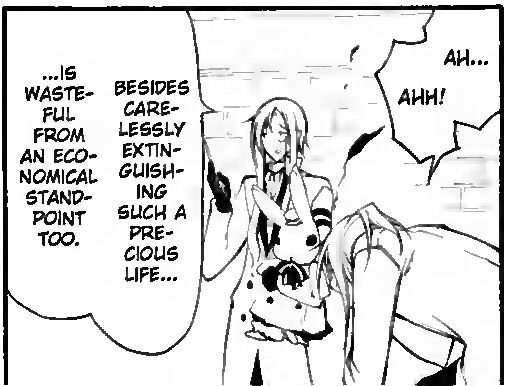

DOSA (WHUMP)
HAAH...
I DUNNO WHO YOU ARE...BUT THANKS.
YOU'RE SO KIND... TO HELP AN ENEMY...
NOT AT ALL.
MY NATURE WON'T ALLOW ME TO ABANDON ANYONE IN SUCH A WEAKENED STATE.


IN-STEAD...
I HAVE NO PENCHANT FOR GOING ABOUT MURDERING WILLY-NILLY LIKE THAT...
IT'S MOST UNFOR-TUNATE, REALLY.
THEY SHOW NO LOVE ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

HYU (SLIT)

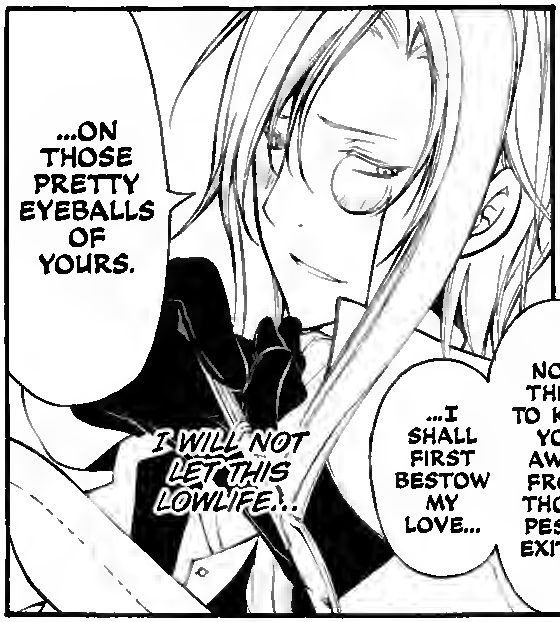

IT MEANS SO MUCH MORE TO RELISH THE KILL—I CONFESS IT IS MY FAVORITE WAY. ♡
...LOVE ONE BODY OVER AND OVER BEFORE STRIKING THE FINAL BLOW.
...I'D MUCH RATHER ...
HUH ...!?


HOW IMPROPER FOR A LADY, MISS MARIANNE.
RIDO! RIDO! I WANT TO SEE YOU SEW UP THAT CUT LIKE HE'S A DOLL!

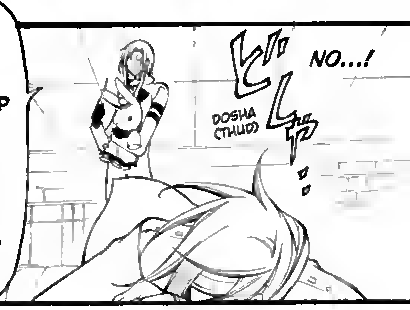

...IS WASTE-FUL FROM AN ECO-NOMICAL STAND-POINT TOO.
BESIDES CARE-LESSLY EXTIN-GUISH-ING SUCH A PRE-CIOUS LIFE...
AH...
AHH!

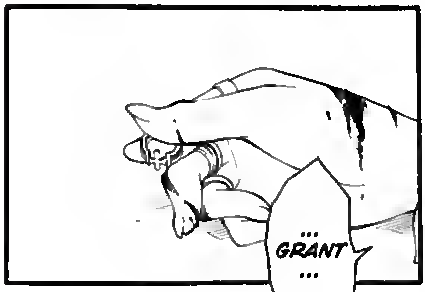
NOW, NOW.
DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THE POINT OF HAVING A SECRET ROOM?
WITHIN THIS SOUND-PROOF ROOM...
...WE CAN HAVE OUR FUN WITHOUT FRIEND OR FOE INTERFERING.

HE'S... BAD NEWS!
BA (LUNGE)
OH?


...ON THOSE PRETTY EYEBALLS OF YOURS.
I WILL NOT LET THIS LOWLIFE...
...I SHALL FIRST BESTOW MY LOVE...
NOW, THEN. TO KEP YOU AWAY FROM THOSE PESKY EXITS...

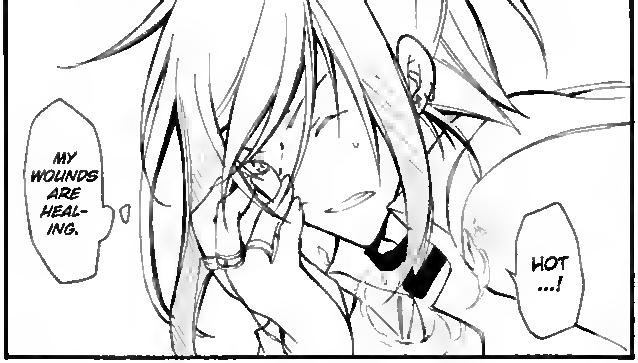
DOSU (SHOONK)
GNH!
DOSU

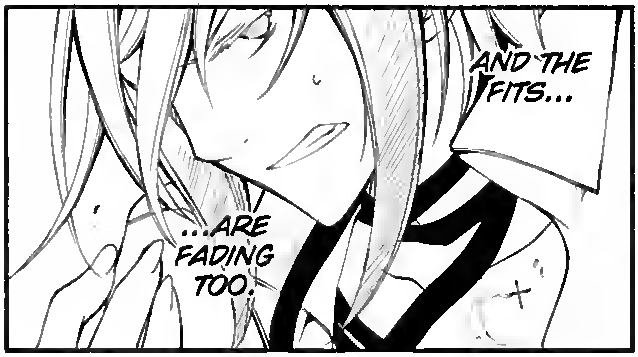

NO...!
DOSHA (THUD)

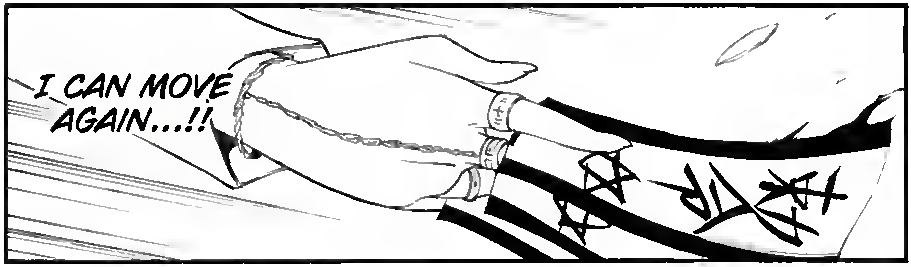

... GRANT ...

...KILL ME HERE...!

110
PAKI
(CRACK)
...ME...
...DIVINE POWER...!!!
GUWA
(WWOOSH)
...!



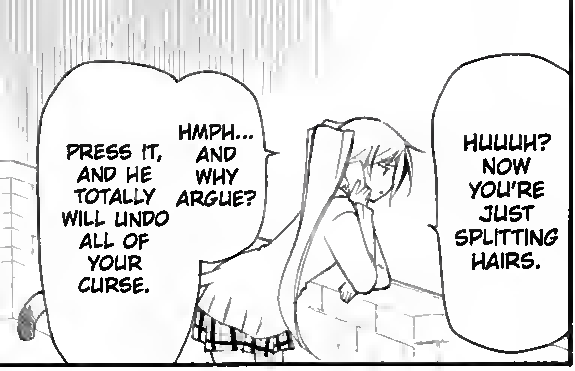


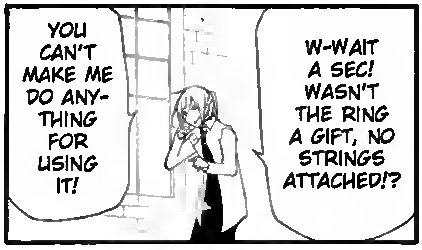


PAPER: IMPERIAL EDICT

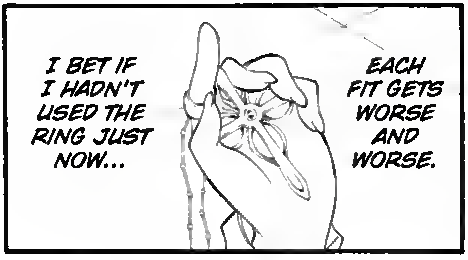
だ
DA
DASH!
YES, HELLO!!?
SHIT!
DAM-MIT... I'M BUSY RIGHT NOW!
RIIING...
PLEASE DON'T COME AFTER ME!
だ DA だ DA
HFF!
HFF!
だ DA
DUDE IS SCARY! SUPER SCARY!
You used the ring, huh?

...!
Mo-mose's been watch-ing you.
We want you to press the cross's gem within the next five — no...
...the next three minutes, okay?
WE'RE SO HAPPY YOU ACCEPTED OUR PRESENT.
SO NOW...
...IT'S YOUR TURN TO DO WHAT MOMOSE ASKS.


HUUUH? NOW YOU'RE JUST SPLITTING HAIRS.
HMPH... AND WHY ARGUE?
PRESS IT, AND HE TOTALLY WILL UNDO ALL OF YOUR CURSE.

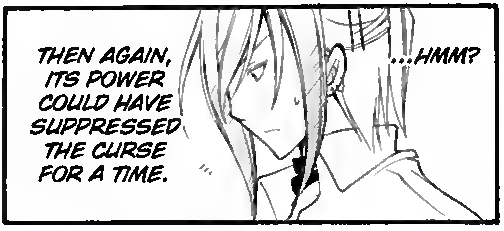

W-WAIT A SEC! WASN'T THE RING A GIFT, NO STRINGS ATTACHED!?
YOU CAN'T MAKE ME DO ANY-THING FOR USING IT!

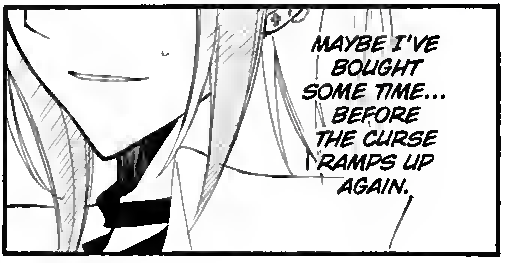
SA-TSU-KI...
...SAID THIS IS YOUR FINAL CHANCE.
IF YOU DON'T DO IT, YOU WON'T GET ANY MORE DIVINE POWER.

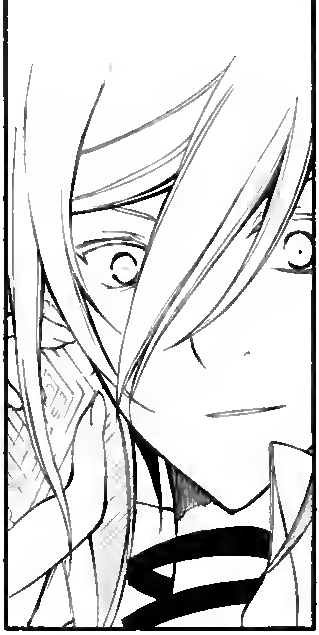

EACH FIT GETS WORSE AND WORSE.
I BET IF I HADN'T USED THE RING JUST NOW...

NH...
...I WANT TO SAY NO, BUT IS THAT REALLY WISE?

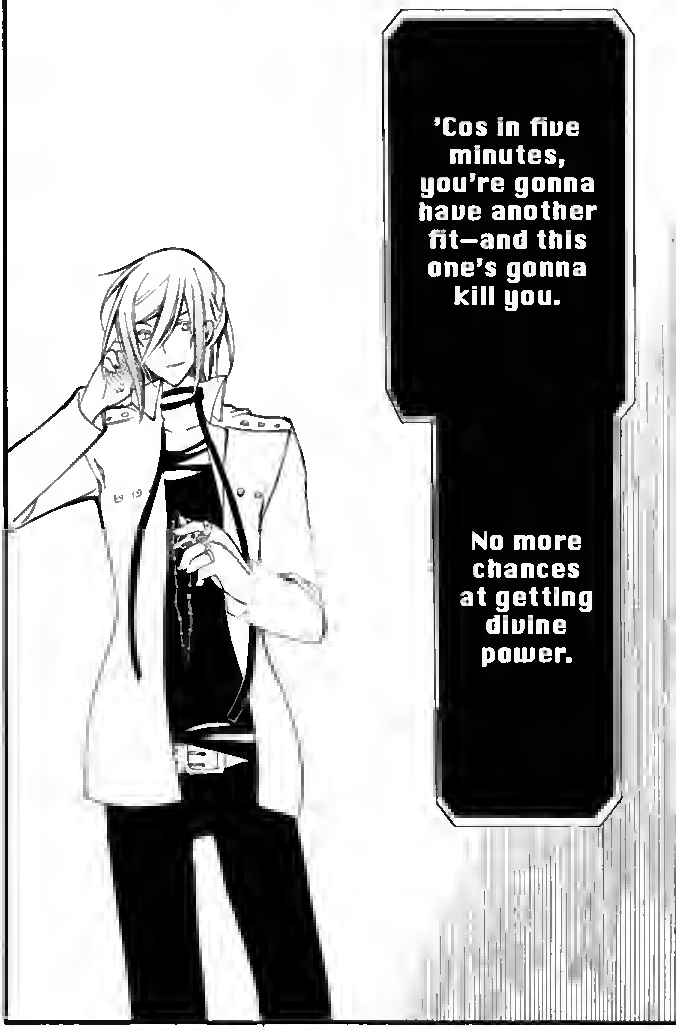
.....
SORRY, BUT—
Awww.
Guess this is good-bye, then.


...HMM?
THEN AGAIN, ITS POWER COULD HAVE SUPPRESSED THE CURSE FOR A TIME.

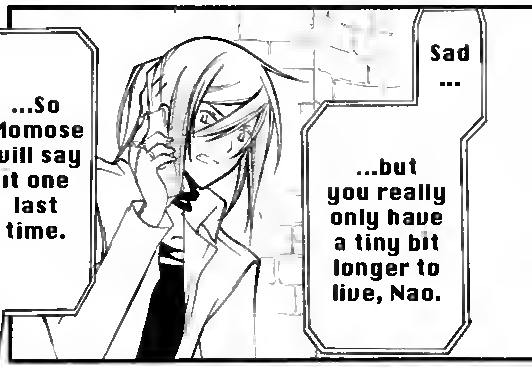

MAYBE I'VE BOUGHT SOME TIME... BEFORE THE CURSE RAMPS UP AGAIN.



FACT IS, THAT LAST FIT SHOULDA KILLED YOU.
GOOD THING YOU USED THE RING.
...
Huh?

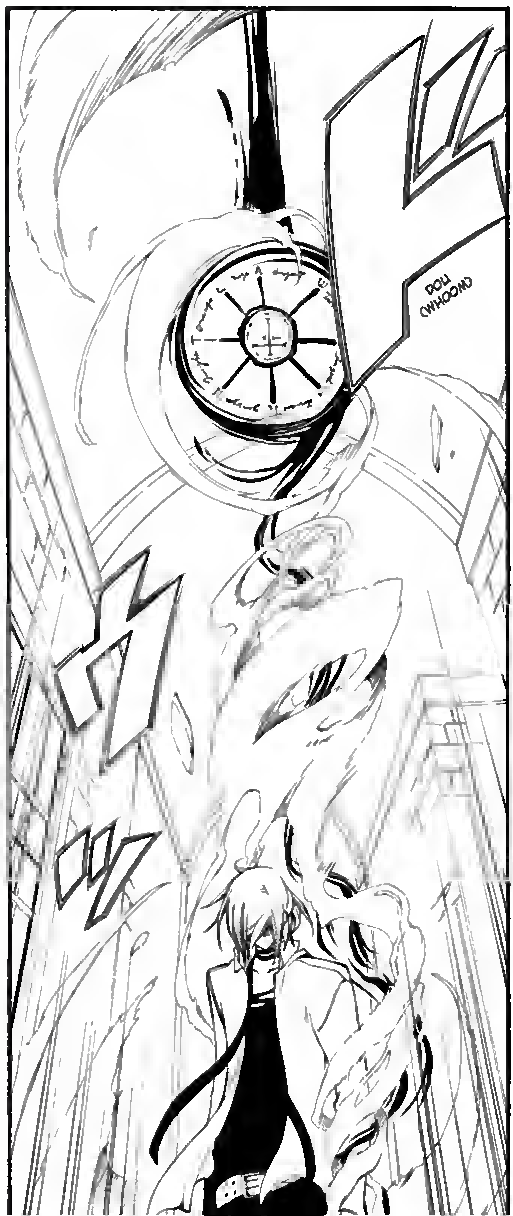

'Cos in five minutes, you're gonna have another fit—and this one's gonna kill you.
No more chances at getting divine power.

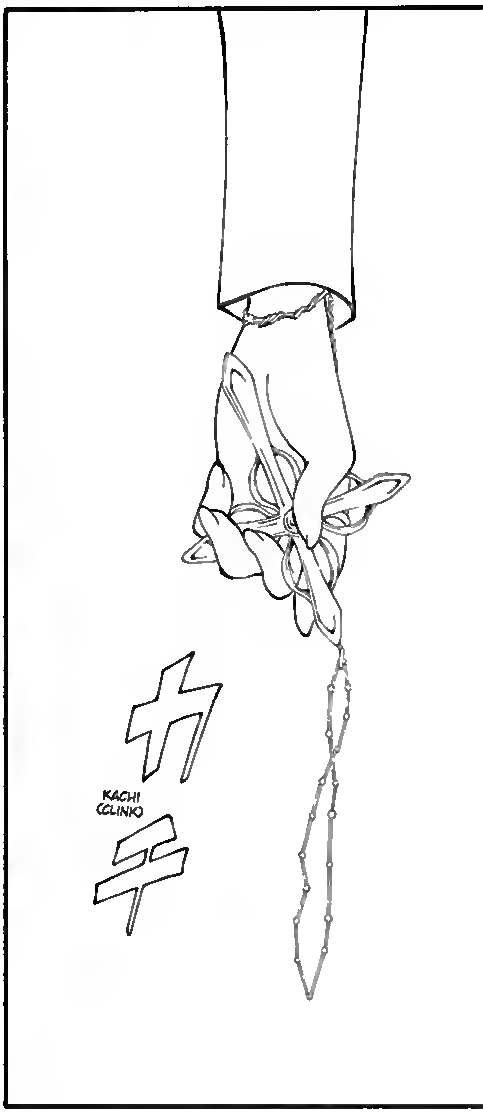
YOU'VE NOTICED, HAVEN'T YOU?
IF YOU'LL PRESS THAT CROSS'S GEM, WE CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE...
...So Momose will say it one last time.

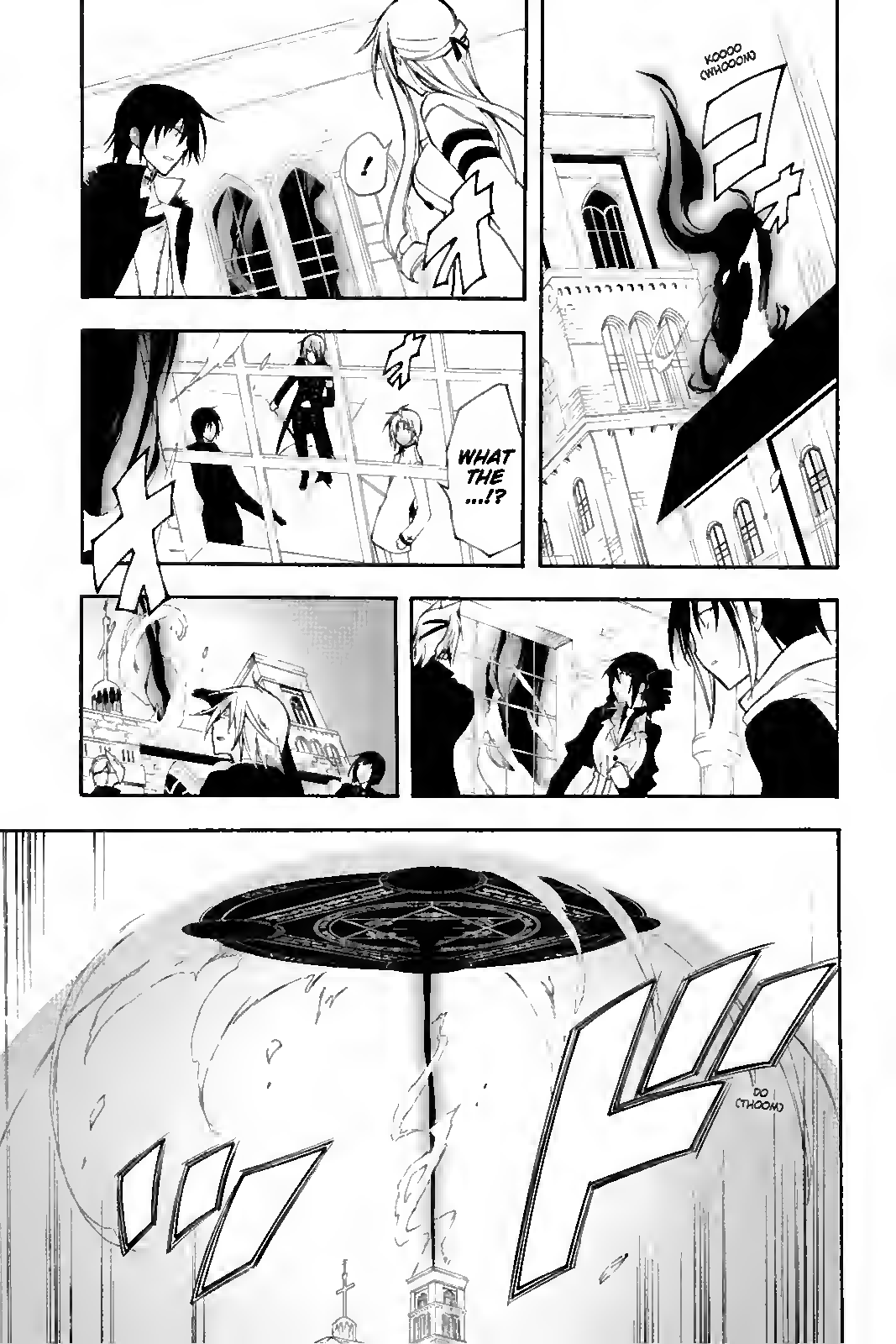

...but you really only have a tiny bit longer to live, Nao.
Sad ...

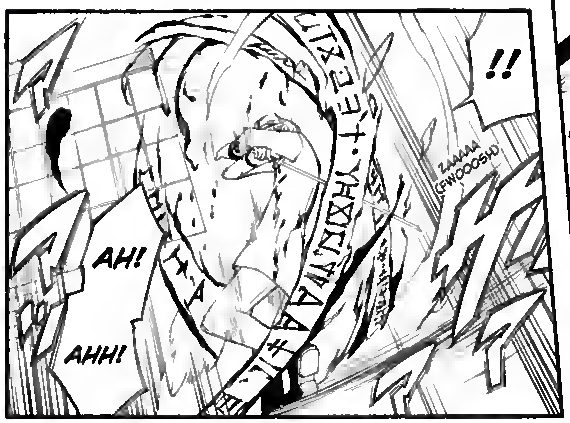
That your fits lately haven't been like normal ones?
NO... NOT "SEEMED TO BE"...
...THEY WERE WHITTLING IT DOWN.
EACH TIME, THEY SEEMED TO BE SHAVING AWAY MY LIFE.
GH...
AH!!
THE CURSE
...SHE'S RIGHT.
NO WAY...
I CAN'T JUST DIE... NOT IN A PLACE LIKE THIS...
...I'VE SCRAMBLED AROUND TRYING TO AVOID IT, BUT THE END'S FINALLY HERE, HUH.
ZURU (SLIDE)
.....AH... WELL...
I DON'T WANT TO DIE...

WE KNOW.
THAT'S WHY...
...WE'LL GIVE YOU ONE LAST CHANCE.


DOU OHHOOHO

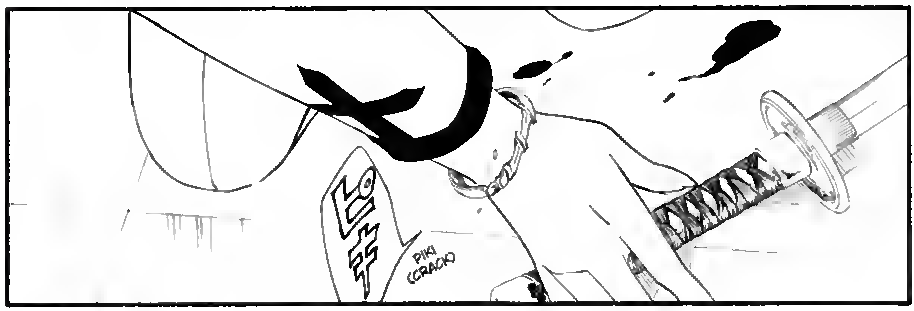

KACHI CLINK


!
KOOOO (WHOOOM)
WHAT THE ...!?
DO (THOOM)

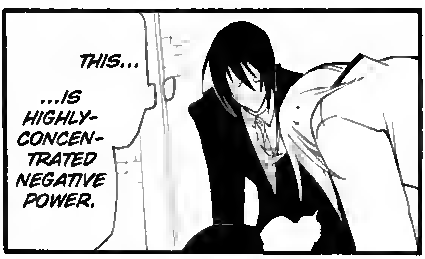

!!
ZAAAAA (FWOOOSH)
AH!
AHH!

VLIN (VWEEAO)
HUH?

TSU-ZUKI!
GA-GHK!
GNH ...
DOSHA (THUD)


PIKI (CRACK)

YOU TWO!
COME LOOK OUT-SIDE!!


THIS...
...IS HIGHLY-CONCEN-TRATED NEGATIVE POWER.

THE ENCROACHING BARRIER SUDDENLY SPED UP...

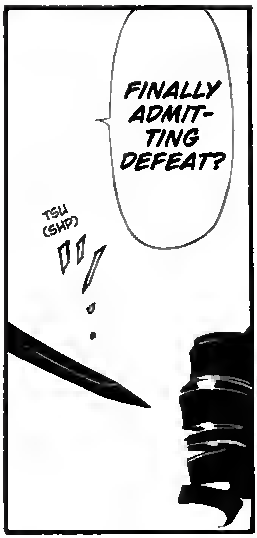
WH... WHAT?

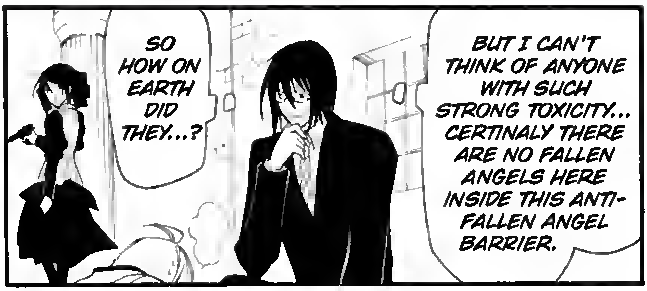
...AND IN AN INSTANT...
...IT'S ALMOST COMPLETELY OVERTAKEN OUR OWN!
GOOOOOO!

...AND SENDING ANTI-ANGEL ENERGY DIRECTLY INTO TSUZUKI'S BODY.
HFF!
THEY'RE GOING THROUGH THE ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER...

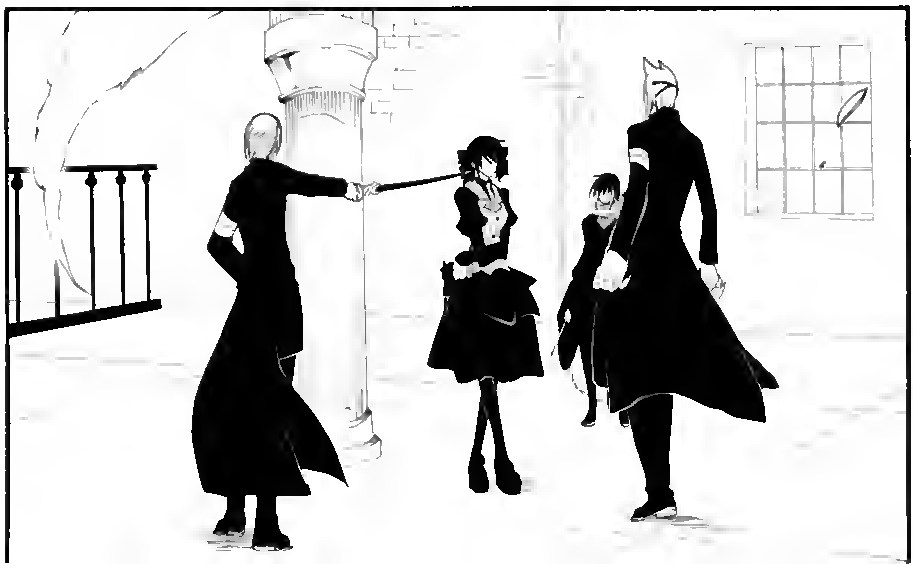
TCH... THAT FLASH AND THE MAGIC ARRAY...
KFF!

AT THIS RATE...
...THE STRAIN ON HIS BODY IS TOO GREAT FOR HIM TO FORCE BACK THE OPPOSING SHIELD...!


FINALLY ADMITTING DEFEAT?
TSU (SHP)


SO HOW ON EARTH DID THEY...?
BUT I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE WITH SUCH STRONG TOXICITY.. CERTINALY THERE ARE NO FALLEN ANGELS HERE INSIDE THIS ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER.

...BUT I GUESS THIS IS THE END.
...
IT'S A SHAME ...

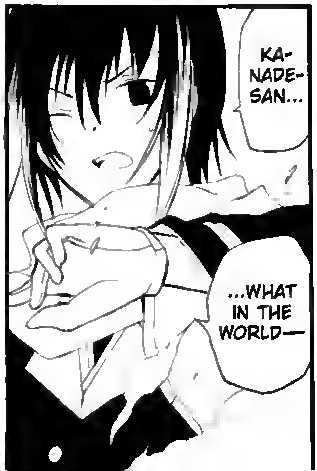


SU (SHFF)
YOU WERE ONE OF US FOR MANY YEARS.
YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO KAMUHABURI TRAITORS... DON'T YOU?
PREPARE YOURSELF.
WELL WHILE I... DO FIND BEING IN SITUATIONS WHERE I'M CORNERED STIMULATING...
?
...EVEN MORE EXCITING...
...IS SEEING OTHERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS.

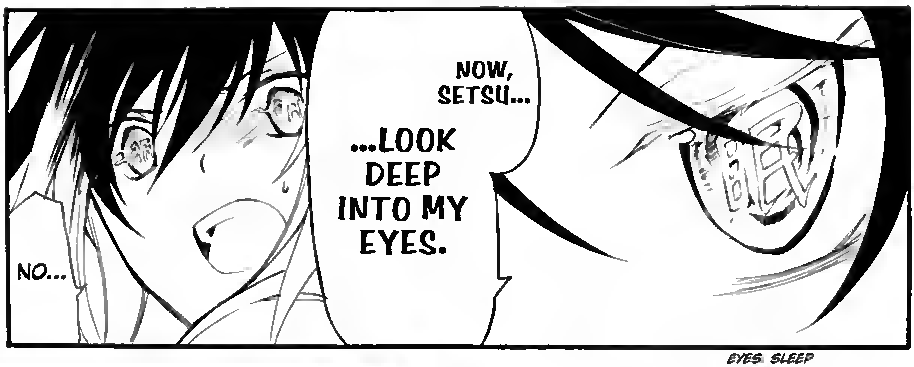
DON
(BLAM)

BOO
(FZZSH)

DOSHA
(CRASH)

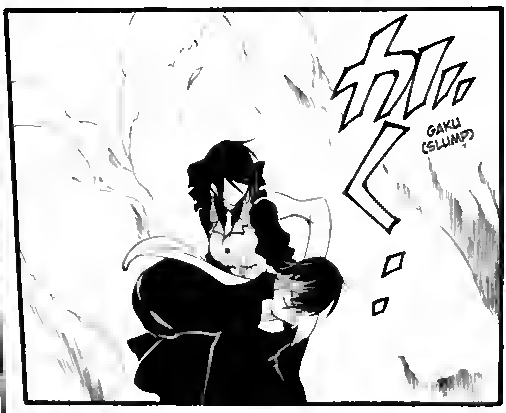

KA-
NADE-
SAN...
...WHAT
IN THE
WORLD—

GOOOO
(WSHHH)
FIRE
...!


NOW, SETSU...
...LOOK DEEP INTO MY EYES.
NO...

EYES. SLEEP

...NOW...
...SHALL WE NEGOTIATE ...
...DEAR EX-COL-LEAGUES?


ガクン
GAKU (SLUMP)

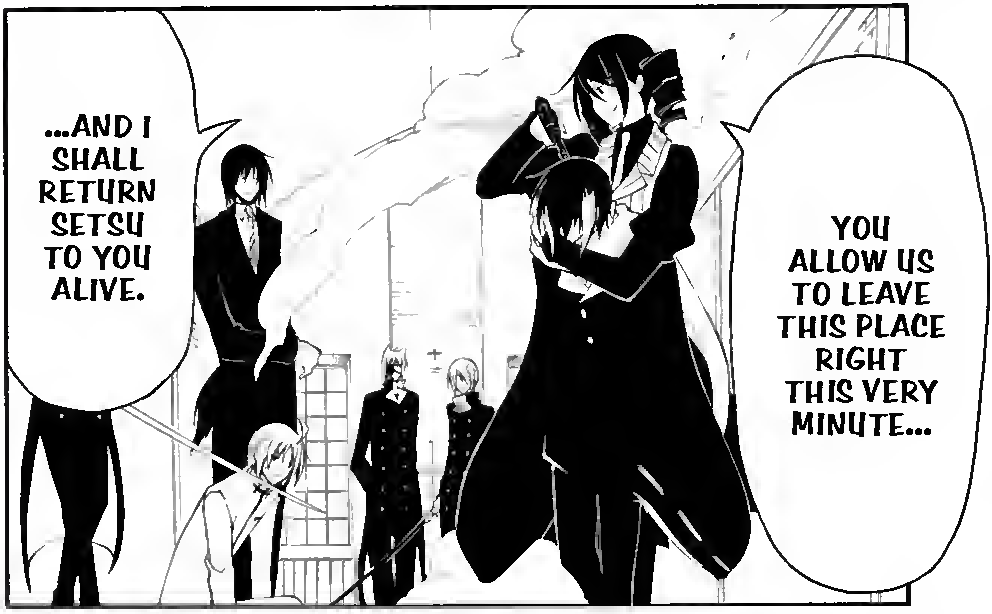
SWEET SETSU...
YOU MUST LET US GO IF YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HIM BACK TO HIS OLD SENSES ONCE MORE.
HEE HEE...
LET'S MAKE A FUN DEAL!

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 38
Forbidden Taste

HEE.
KIKU-SAKA...
ICHI-KAWA...
NEITHER OF YOU BUDGE AN INCH, PLEASE.
ANY SUSPI-CIOUS MOVES...
...AND I PROMISE I'LL PUT A HOLE IN SETSU'S HEAD.

LET'S MAKE A FUN DEAL.


YOU ALLOW US TO LEAVE THIS PLACE RIGHT THIS VERY MINUTE...
...AND I SHALL RETURN SETSU TO YOU ALIVE.

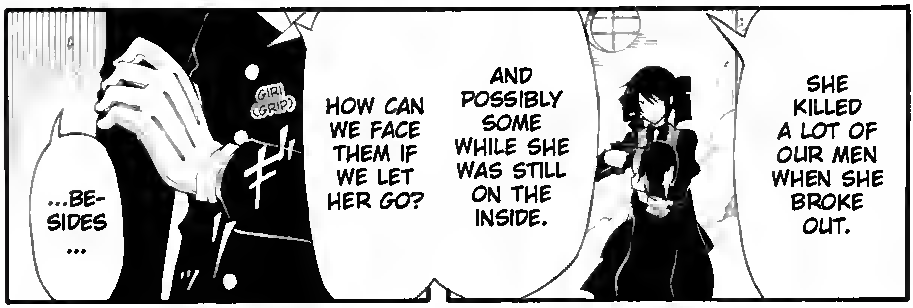
MY, YOU SEEM CONFI-DENT.
BUT YOU MIS-UNDER-STAND.

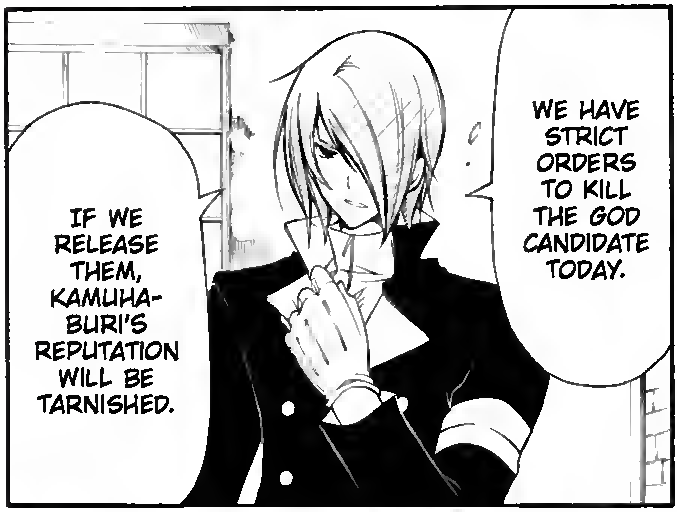
I'M THE ONE WITH THE UPPER HAND HERE.
GU (PRESS)

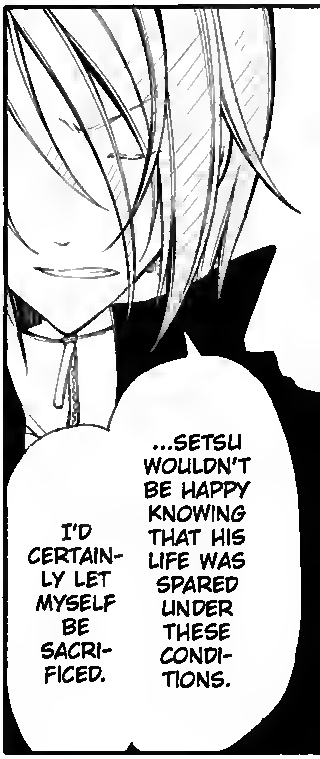
...SERI-OUSLY?
THAT'S A LOW, DESPI-CABLE PLAY.
IT SEEMS YOU THREW AWAY YOUR PRIDE ALONG WITH YOUR LOYALTY.

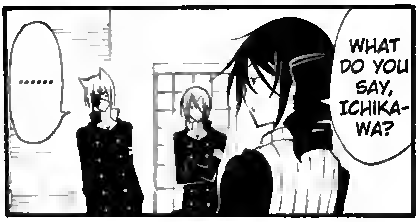
.....!
DON/ (BLAM)
UNH ...
BOTH
BOTH (SPLAT)
SHALL I TAKE OFF ONE OF HIS EARS NEXT?
.....
...GIVE US SOME TIME. WE'LL CALL TOKIWA-SAN.
THAT WON'T DO.
OUR SIDE DOESN'T HAVE TIME. YOU MUST DECIDE RIGHT NOW.

I'M AGAINST IT.
WE CAN'T JUST RELEASE THE GOD CANDIDATE AND THE TRAITOR!


SHE KILLED A LOT OF OUR MEN WHEN SHE BROKE OUT.
AND POSSIBLY SOME WHILE SHE WAS STILL ON THE INSIDE.
HOW CAN WE FACE THEM IF WE LET HER GO?
GIRI GIRI!
...BE-SIDES ...

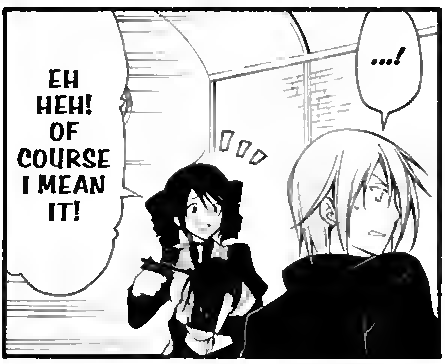

WE HAVE STRICT ORDERS TO KILL THE GOD CANDIDATE TODAY.
IF WE RELEASE THEM, KAMUHA-BURI'S REPUTATION WILL BE TARNISHED.


...SETSU WOULDN'T BE HAPPY KNOWING THAT HIS LIFE WAS SPARED UNDER THESE CONDI-TIONS.
I'D CERTAIN-LY LET MYSELF BE SACRI-FICED.

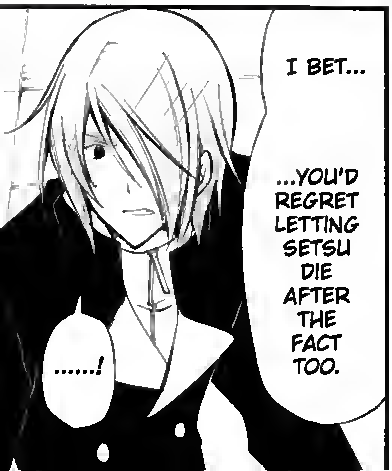

WHAT DO YOU SAY, ICHIKA-WA?
.....

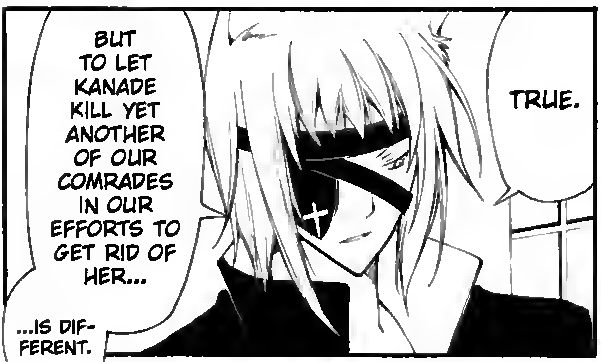
.....
...YOU'LL LET SETSU LIVE?
YOU MEAN THAT?

I CAN'T BE-LIEVE YOU!
AS A MEMBER OF KAMU-HABURI ...
...SETSU KNOWS HE MIGHT LOSE HIS LIFE UNDER SUCH CIRCUM-STANCES!

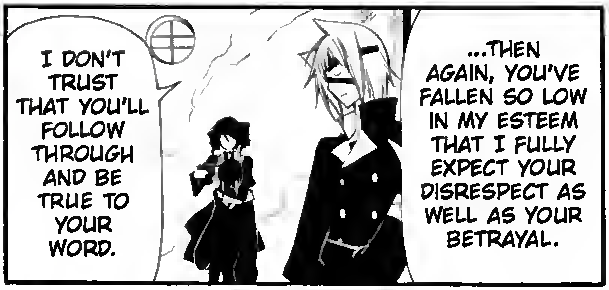

...!
EH HEH! OF COURSE I MEAN IT!

I SEE. GOOD.
ICHI-KAWA... ARE YOU SERI-OUS?

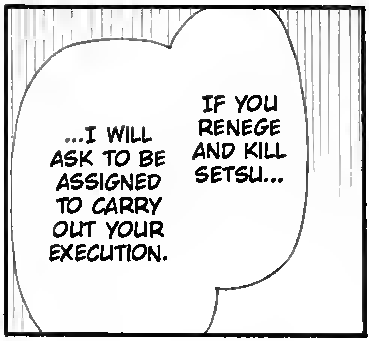

I BET...
...YOU'D REGRET LETTING SETSU DIE AFTER THE FACT TOO.
.....!


TRUE.
BUT TO LET KANADE KILL YET ANOTHER OF OUR COMRADES IN OUR EFFORTS TO GET RID OF HER...
...IS DIF-FERENT.

I'LL TAKE THE FALL FOR THIS.
IN RETURN, YOU HAD BETTER KEEP YOUR PROMISE, KANADE.


I DON'T TRUST THAT YOU'LL FOLLOW THROUGH AND BE TRUE TO YOUR WORD.
...THEN AGAIN, YOU'VE FALLEN SO LOW IN MY ESTEEM THAT I FULLY EXPECT YOUR DISRESPECT AS WELL AS YOUR BETRAYAL.

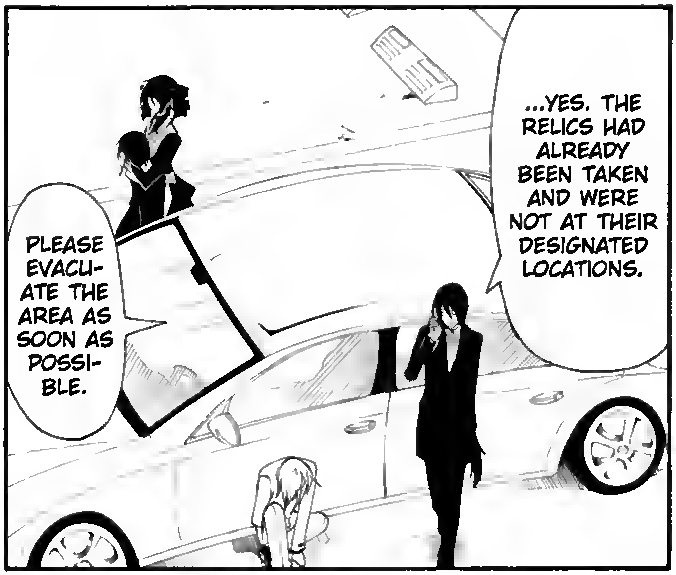
HEE HEE!
OF COURSE! ♥ YOU CAN TRUST ME.

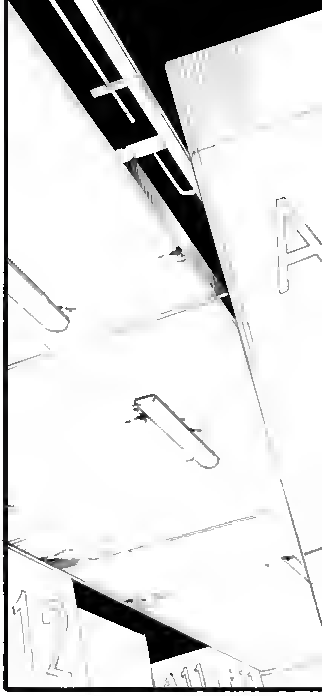

...I WILL ASK TO BE ASSIGNED TO CARRY OUT YOUR EXECUTION.
IF YOU RENEGE AND KILL SETSU...

.....
FOR THE RECORD, I THINK THOSE WHO LEAVE KAMUHABURI ARE QUITTERS WHO LACK RESOLVE.
AS FOR THOSE WHO DO HARM TO OTHERS ...
...I FEEL THEY'VE DROWNED THEIR RIGHT TO EXIST IN THE MUD.

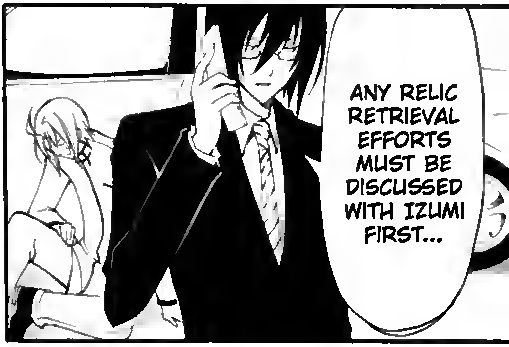
...TRAI-TOR.
DON'T EXPECT A NORMAL DEATH...

THAT ALL YOU WANT TO SAY?
.....
WELL.
...BUT WE MUST BE GETTING ON OUR WAY.
PI (FWP)
THEN ... ...I APOLO-GIZE...
.....
VUN (WHOOSH)
ACTI-VATE!
TRANS-PORT SPELL!
FARE THEE WELL, YOU TWO.
AAA (SHH)
THANKS FOR A FUN TIME.
ZAA (FWSHH)
I'LL RELEASE THE HOSTAGE AFTER WE REACH SAFETY.


...YES. THE RELICS HAD ALREADY BEEN TAKEN AND WERE NOT AT THEIR DESIGNATED LOCATIONS.
PLEASE EVACUATE THE AREA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.



DOSA (THUD)


ANY RELIC RETRIEVAL EFFORTS MUST BE DISCUSSED WITH IZUMI FIRST...

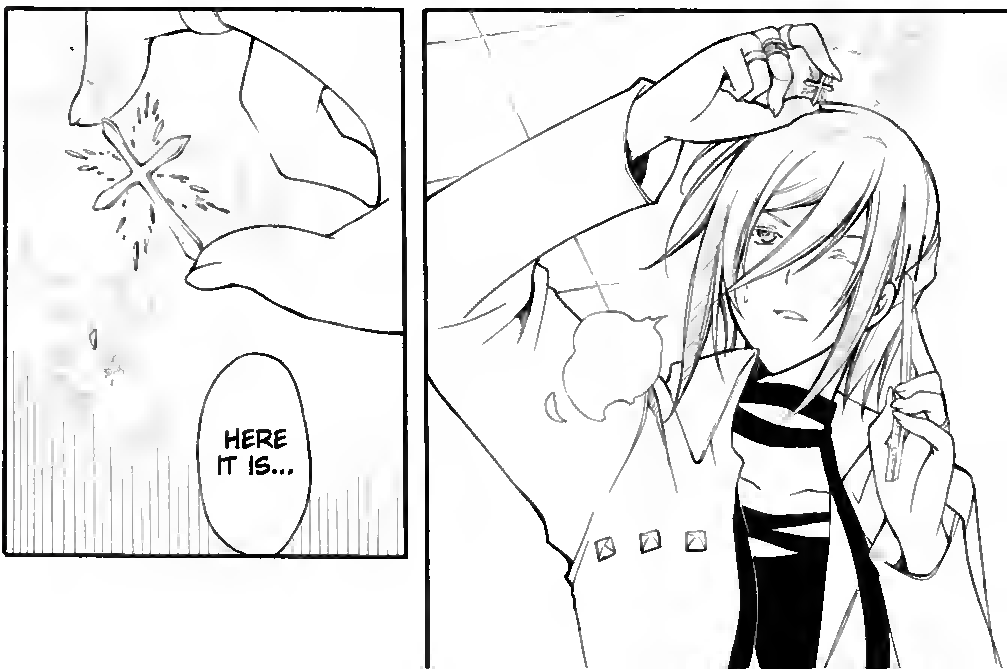
...!
JA (CLICK)
FOOLS.
ONCE THEY'VE SERVED THEIR PURPOSE, HOSTAGES ARE SUPERFLUOUS.
POWERLESS WEAKLINGS LIKE HIM, ESPECIALLY, SHOULD BE DISPOSED OF.
THEY'LL KILL ME, THEY SAY?
WHAT A PATHETIC JOKE.
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHY...I LET IT BOTHER ME.
GU (SQUEEZE)

GU (GRAB)
STOP IT.
PULLING A STUNT LIKE THAT DOESN'T GO DOWN WELL WITH ME.
...OH?
HOW VERY SOFT FOR A GOD CANDI-DATE.
YOUR RIVAL GOD CANDIDATE IS DOING EVERYTHING HE CAN TO GRIND YOU INTO THE DUST, AND YET...
...YOU HESITATE TO KILL AN ENEMY?
...AND YOU STILL DON'T THINK YOU'LL LOSE?
...
BESIDES... IF I HADN'T USED MY WILES, YOU'D HAVE BEEN KILLED BY KAMUHABURI BACK THERE.
SO I DON'T BELIEVE YOU'RE IN A POSITION TO ORDER ME AROUND.
.....

...HOWEVER, I DON'T RELISH FEELING THE GLARES OF MY NEW ALLIES EITHER.
VERY WELL...I'LL LET HIM LIVE THIS TIME.
HAAHoo.
GACHA GACHAKO
YEAH.
IS THAT ACCEPT-ABLE...
...GOD CANDI-DATE?
SHALL WE MAKE OUR "RETREAT TO REGROUP" MANEUVER, THEN?
OR...
...IS IT A "FLIGHT FROM ADVERSI-TY"?

It is, it is! Momose just hid it here earlier.
...THE REST OF THE DIVINE POWER TO UNDO MY CURSE HAD BETTER BE DOWN HERE.
...TCH...

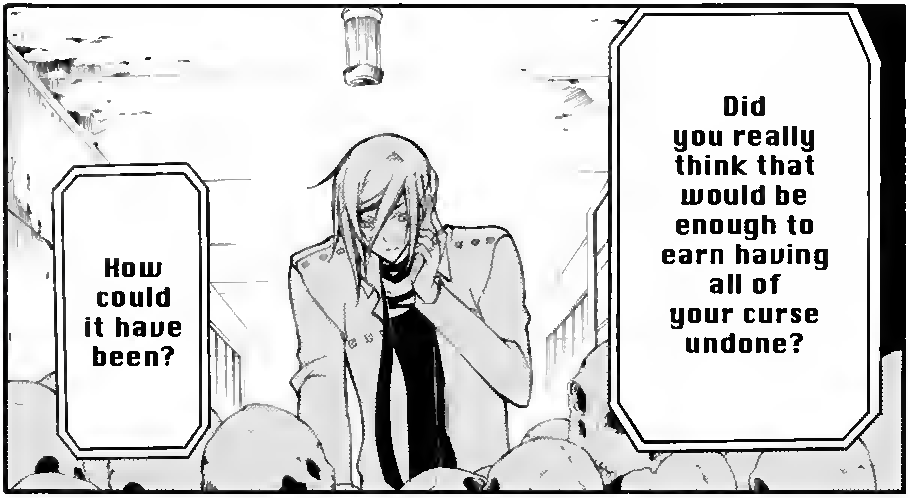
... missing a bunch of teeth...
カチャリ
KACHARI (CLINK)
Seventh from the right...
It's inside the eye socket of one of those skulls.
GROSS.


HERE IT IS...

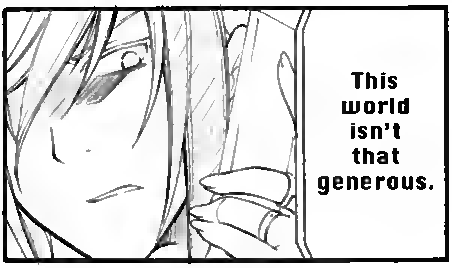
...EVEN IF MY SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON IT, I STILL FEEL GUILTY FOR BETRAYING TSUZUKI.
KOO (WHOOSH)
GYU (CLUTCH)
...OF DIVINE POWER I NEED...!
THE LAST BIT...
...ONCE I'M FREED FROM MY CURSE...!
BUT AFTER THIS...
OOO (WHOO)
THE CURSE ...
...TO MAKE UP FOR MY BETRAYAL!
HOT...!
I'LL SERVE TSUZUKI WITH TWICE THE DEVOTION...

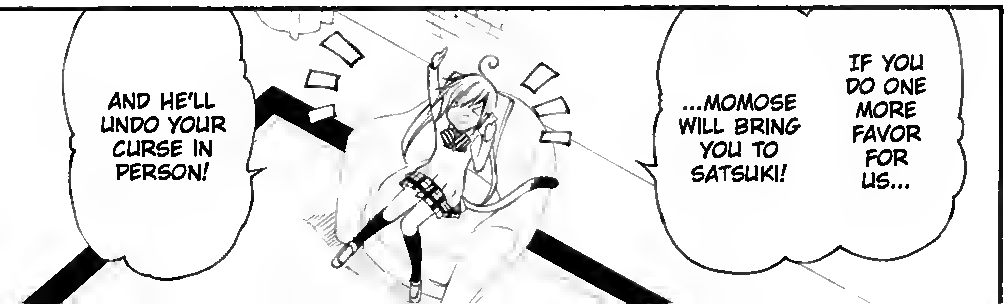
THE MARK...
...IS...
Oh, so you noticed that, huh?
Eh Heh.
That actually wasn't nearly enough divine power to undo your curse... Sorry!
♥
...NOT GONE!?
GAN (SHOCK)
EEP!
DAN (SLAM)
HE ALSO SAID HE'LL DEFINITELY TOTALLY UNDO IT NEXT TI—
OH, AND!
Huh!?
...TO GIVE YOU MORE TIME BEFORE YOU HAVE THE FINAL FIT THAT KILLS YOU!
BUT BE HAPPY! SATSUKI TWEAKED IT...
GU (CLENCH)
YAY, SATSUKI!

GIMME A BREAK!
I DID WHAT YOU ASKED AT THE COST OF PUTTING MY ALLIES IN AN EVEN WORSE SITUATION!
THIS WASN'T THE DEAL!
UNDO IT LIKE YOU PROM-ISED!!
...but, come on...


Did you really think that would be enough to earn having all of your curse undone?
How could it have been?

BUT, BUT! YOU'VE DONE SO MUCH FOR US UP TILL NOW, NAO.
THE NEXT TIME WILL BE FOR REAL.


This world isn't that generous.

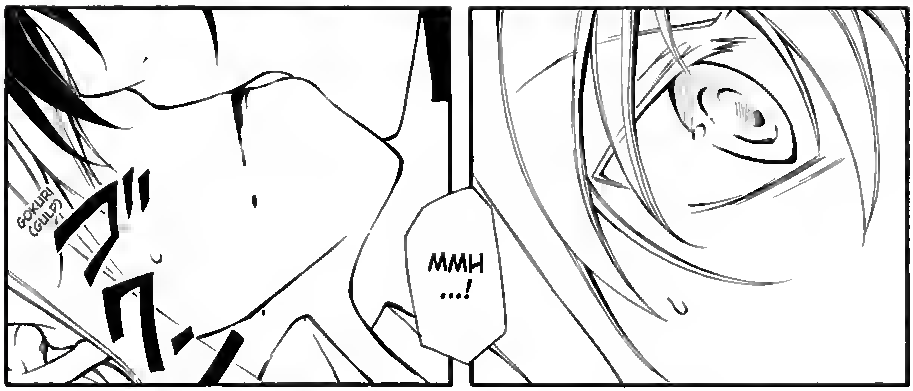

IF YOU DO ONE MORE FAVOR FOR US...
...MOMOSE WILL BRING YOU TO SATSUKI!
AND HE'LL UNDO YOUR CURSE IN PERSON!

...Shut up. I can't trust you.
Huh...? But Tsuzuki doesn't have much divine power...
...and you don't have strong ties with Arcana.
The way Momose sees it, Satsuki really is...
...the only one who can give you the divine power you need.
Well...
...Momose doesn't care if you don't trust us—if you don't mind dying.
'Kay, talk to you later!
...!
Butsu (click)
Hey!
Tsuuu
Tsuuu
Tsuuu (boop?)
...Dam-mit!
Gasha (clatter)
Is my only choice to rely on thugs like them...!?
Dam-mit!

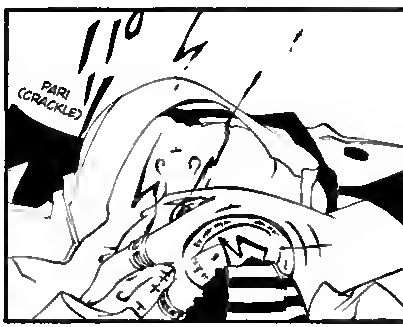
FINALLY SETTLING DOWN?
TOLD YOU I'D GET YOU.
...
GOOD GAME.
NOW THAT OUR GAME OF TAG IS OVER...
...I'M GONNA UNDO THAT JOKE OF A BRAIN-WASHING LIKE I PROMISED.
THEY MUST HAVE MARKED YOU SOME-WHERE TO ACT AS THE FOCUS OF THE SPELL.
A MARK?
MY GUESS... IS THE BRAND.

BA (CRIP)
HAH... I WAS RIGHT.
PARI (CRACKLE)
ALL RIGHTY, THEN...
BEEN A WHILE, BUT WHEN YOU GOTTA, YOU GOTTA...
MUNI (MOOSH)
NULL SPELL!
WHA ...!?
...EN-EMY? YOU?
KACHIN (CLINK)
YOUR BRAIN-WASHING SURE IS ANNOYING ...!
GUI (YANK)
AH, LOVE THE PERKS.
MOMISHI
MOMISHI (SQUISH)
...YOU'RE BEING AWFULLY FAMILIAR WITH AN ENEMY.
CAN'T YOU FIND ONE OF YOUR FRIENDS TO DO THIS WITH?

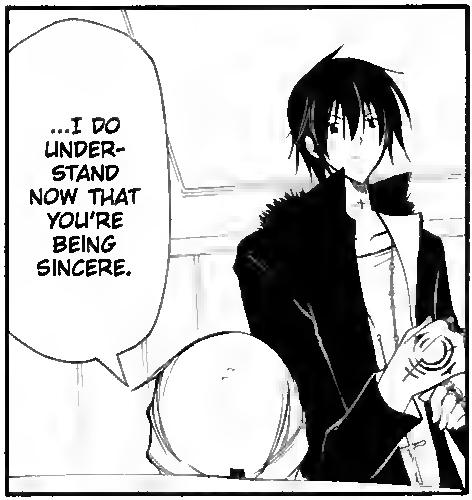
HEY...
...LISTEN TO ME, OKAY? I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY.
.....WELL... AT LEAST NOT UNTIL YOU WERE CAPTURED AND BRAIN-WASHED BY KAMUHA-BURI...
THOUGH WE DID WIND UP ON OPPOSITE SIDES SOMETIMES..
ACTUALLY QUITE A LOT, I GUESS.
HUH?
GUH...
I WISH YOU'D JUST SNAP OUT OF IT AND REMEMBER. 'S A REAL PAIN...
CAN'T YOU READ INFORMATION FROM A PERSON'S BLOOD?
SO DRINK MINE.
BITE MY TONGUE OR LIP.
TAKE THE MEMORIES OF YOU THAT MY BLOOD HOLDS.
GU (GRIP)
TAKE ENOUGH ...
...TO BREAK THE CONDI-TIONING.

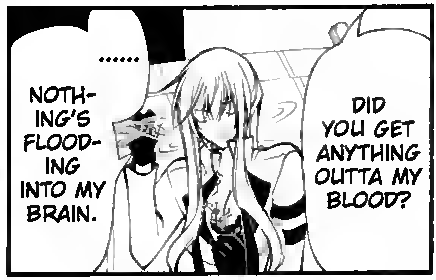

GOKURI (GULP)
MMH ...!

.....!
BACHI (BZZT)


PARI (CRACKLE)

THE BRAIN-WASHING SPELL ON YOUR MARK IS TOO STRONG.
IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE TO UNDO HERE WITHOUT ANY EQUIP-MENT.
.....
... DAM-MIT!


...I DO UNDER-STAND NOW THAT YOU'RE BEING SINCERE.

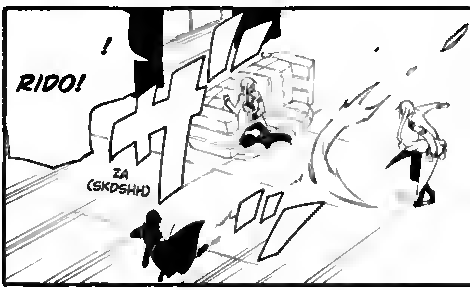

.....
NOTH-ING'S FLOOD-ING INTO MY BRAIN.
DID YOU GET ANYTHING OUTTA MY BLOOD?

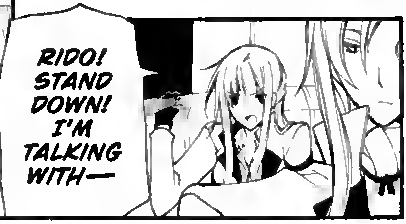
..... BUT...

WHAT YOU KNOW, IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU CAN...
...ABOUT ME BEING BRAIN-WASHED.
SO TELL ME.

SURE—

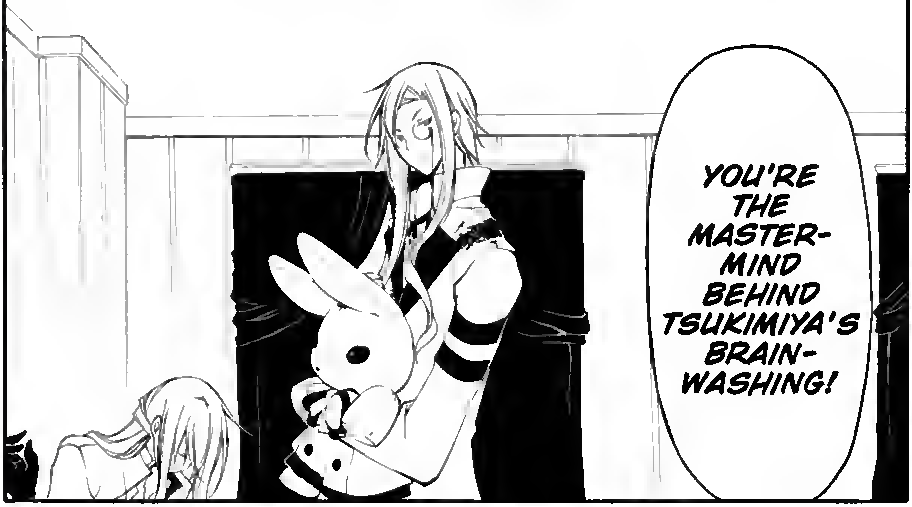
PACHIN
(SNAP)

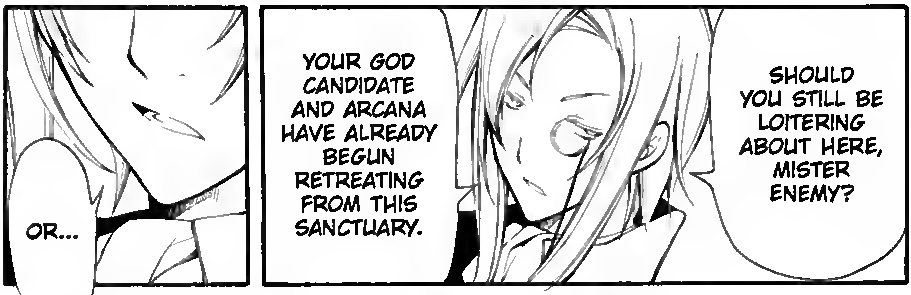

!
RIDO!
ZA
(SKDSHH)


RIDO!
STAND
DOWN!
I'M
TALKING
WITH—

I SEE.

GAKU
(SLUMP)
.....!

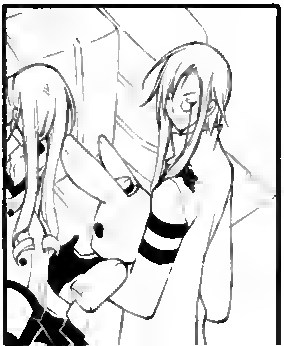

YOU'RE THE MASTER-MIND BEHIND TSUKIMIYA'S BRAIN-WASHING!


OR...
YOUR GOD CANDIDATE AND ARCANA HAVE ALREADY BEGUN RETREATING FROM THIS SANCTUARY.
SHOULD YOU STILL BE LOITERING ABOUT HERE, MISTER ENEMY?

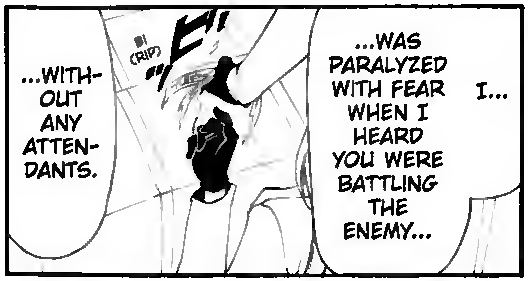
ZAA CRNOOSHD
JUST YOU WAIT...YOU JERK!

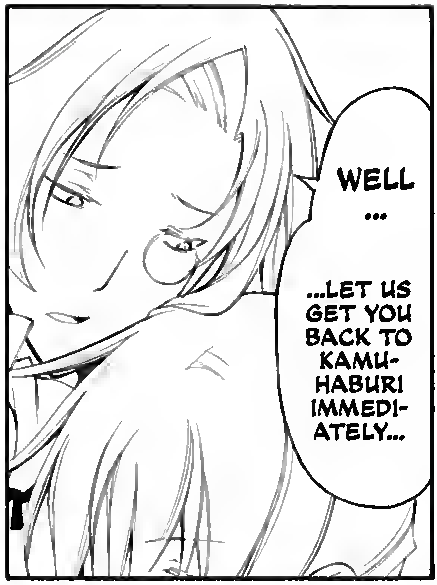
...DO YOU WISH TO COMMIT SUICIDE?

...DAM-MIT!



NOW...I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE SAFE, LADY TSUKIMIYA.
KOTSU (TOKK)


...WITHOUT ANY ATTENDANTS.
BI (RID)
I... ...WAS PARALYZED WITH FEAR WHEN I HEARD YOU WERE BATTLING THE ENEMY...


WELL ...
...LET US GET YOU BACK TO KAMUHABURI IMMEDIATELY...

HAAH ...
KYU (HUG)

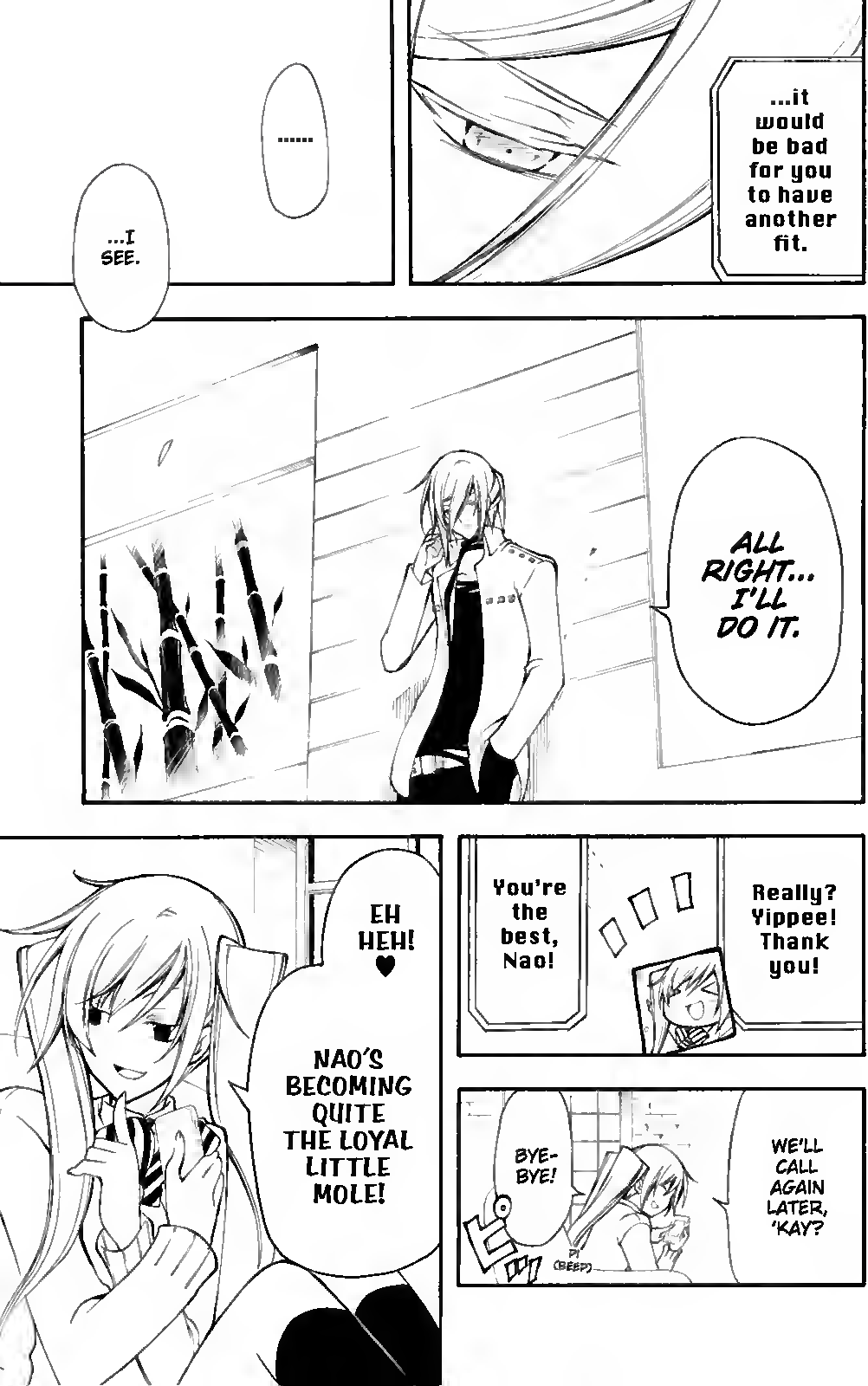
...REINFORCEMENT OF YOUR BRAINWASHING.
...AND I WILL PERFORM THE USUAL...

THE RELICS HAD ALREADY BEEN TAKEN...
.....HUH.
THIS IS... PROB-LEMAT-IC.
IF THE RELICS CAN BE TAKEN AHEAD OF EACH CRUSADE...
...THE POINT OF HAVING TWO GOD CANDIDATES BECOMES MOOT.
AT THIS RATE, IT WILL TURN INTO A ONE-MAN SHOW STARRING SATSUKI.
YOU THINK SO? IF HE'S GRAB-BING THEM FIRST...
...WHY CAN'T WE JUST STEAL THEM BACK FROM HIM?
LIKE IT'S THAT SIMPLE ...
WHERE IS TSU-ZUKI?
...
COME TO THINK OF IT
I SET HIM UP WITH A PLACE TO REST.
HE TOOK A HIT WHEN THE ENEMY SENT ANTI-ANGEL POWER DIRECTLY INTO HIS BODY...
...AFTER THE ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER COLLAPSED.
.....

EVEN IF WE WERE TO STEAL THE RELICS FROM THE ENEMY, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE AFTER TSUZUKI FULLY RE-COVERS...
...OR HE MIGHT BE KILLED INSTEAD.
THEY DID SAY...
..."WE HAVE STRICT ORDERS TO KILL THE GOD CANDIDATE TODAY."
.....!
...KILLED? THAT'S HOW BAD THE ATTACK WAS? EVEN THOUGH...
...THE CRUSADES WOULD END IF HE DIED?
I SEE.
IT SEEMS... SATSUKI AND HIS ALLIES HAVE FOUND A WAY TO PROCURE CRUSADE RELICS INDEPENDENT OF THE CRUSADES.
WE ARE IN A DIFFICULT PREDICA-MENT.
ACCORD-ING TO THE DECODED PRO-PHECY BOOK, THE NEXT CRUSADE IS, WHAT... THREE WEEKS FROM NOW?
WE HAD BEST KEEP TSUZUKI BEHIND THE FRONT LINES FOR A WHILE.
IF HE'S KILLED, WE'LL LOSE OUR MEANS OF TAKING PART IN THE CRUSADES ...
GATA (CLATTER)

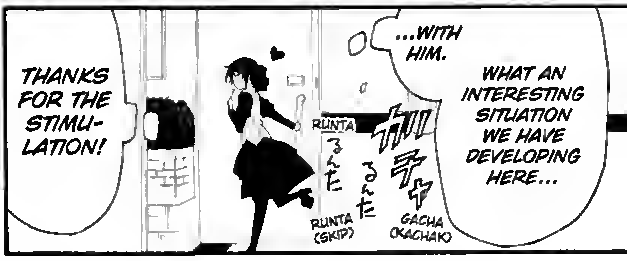
WE'RE NOT GONNA HAVE... THAT LUXURY.
TSU-ZUKI ...!
I HAVE A NEW ORACLE.
THE NEXT CRUSADE.
!
THE RELICS WILL BE APPEARING ...
...AT MID-NIGHT TO-NIGHT!
GU (CLENCH)
THE TIMELINE OF THE CRUSADES... HAS SHIFTED FROM THE PROPHECY.
SOME-THING DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT...
I FEEL...
...AS IF THE CRUSADES ARE BECOMING SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT I KNOW.

RIIING...
...HELLO?
It's Momose.
Hey, you heard about the Crusade?
You'll help us again, right?
HEY... HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?
Huh?
Hmm... Let's just say...
USE THE COMM OR YOUR CELL. ARE YOU STUPID?
WHAT!? HEY, I CAME TO TELL YOU IMPORTANT INFORMATION!
SHEESH, DON'T GET UP IF YOU'RE SO WEAK!
.....
NO! I'D RATHER BE PUT DOWN ON A FUTON!
SHALL WE DUMP YOU ON THE FLOOR?
THEN WALK ON YOUR OWN.
OWW! MY BACK IS GONNA CRAMP!


...it would be bad for you to have another fit.
.....
...I SEE.
ALL RIGHT... I'LL DO IT.
You're the best, Nao!
Really? Yippee! Thank you!
BYE-BYE!
PI (BEEP)
WE'LL CALL AGAIN LATER, 'KAY?
EH HEH! ♥
NAO'S BECOMING QUITE THE LOYAL LITTLE MOLE!

PATAN (SHUT)
.....
WELL, THEN.

...OH MY.

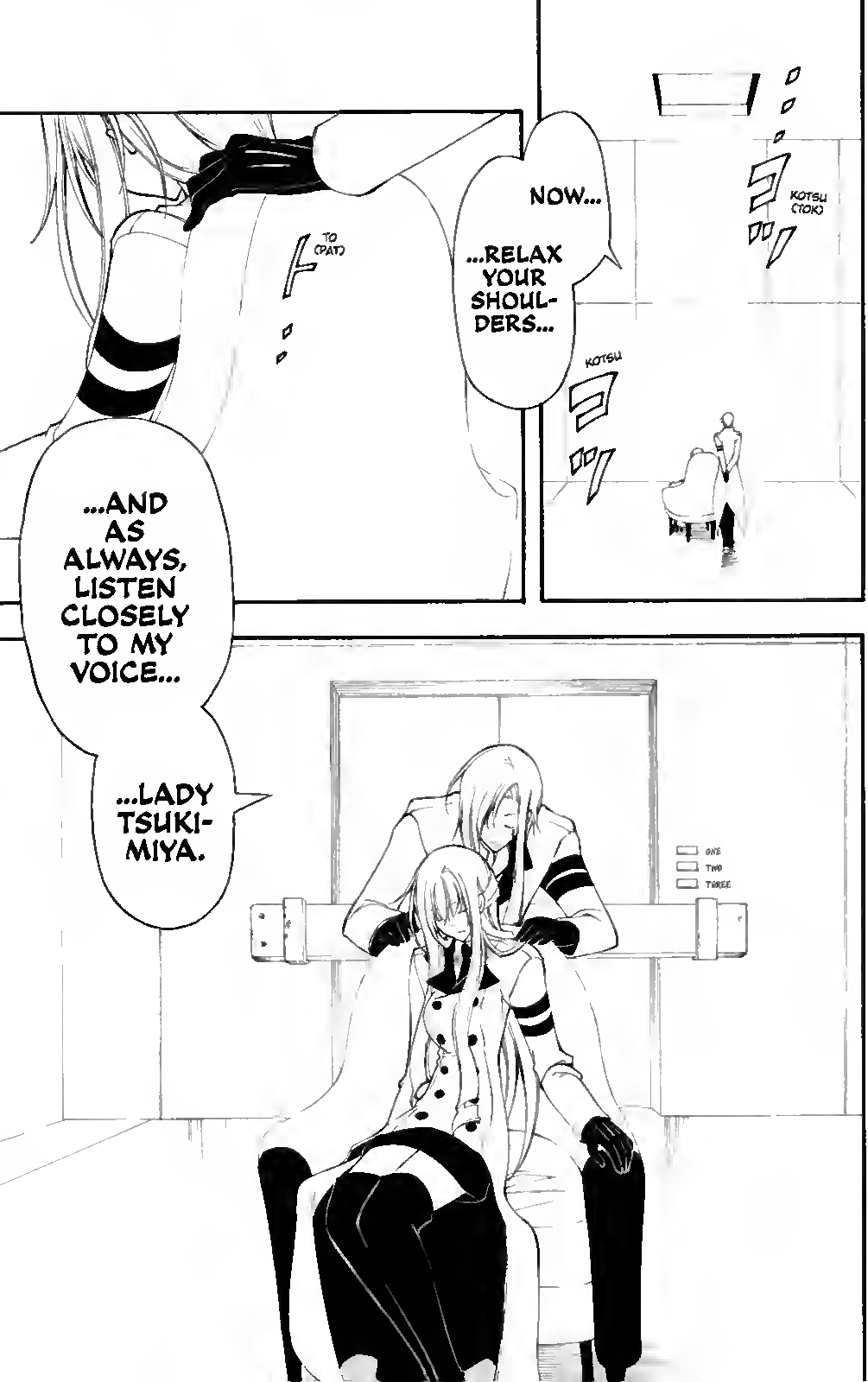

THANKS FOR THE STIMU-LATION!
RUNTA
るんた
RUNTA (SKIP)
ガチャ
GACHA (KACHAK)
...WITH HIM.
WHAT AN INTERESTING SITUATION WE HAVE DEVELOPING HERE...

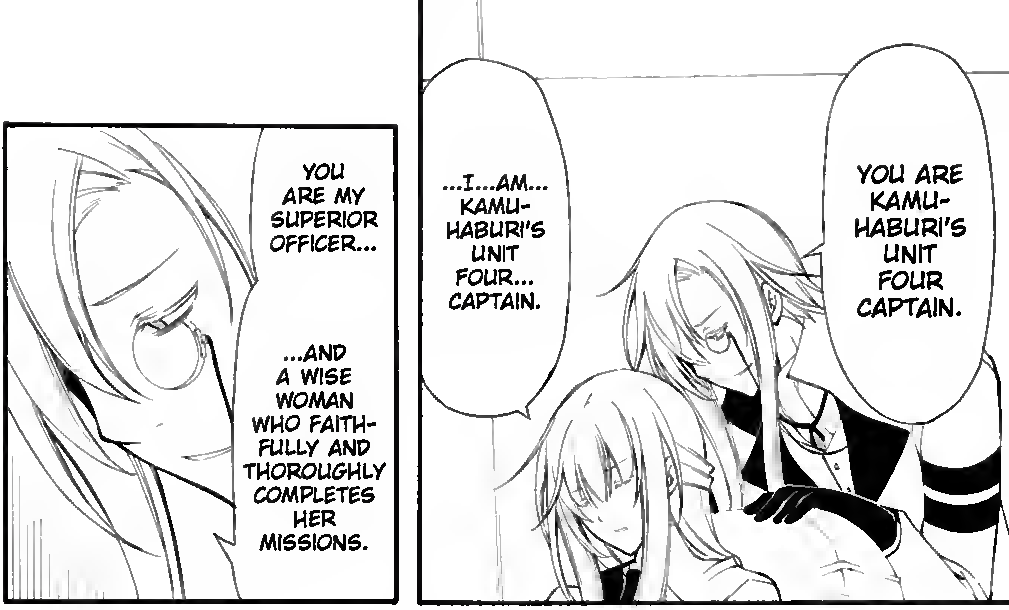
.....HELLO? IT'S ME.
す
SU (STAFF)
CALL
090-XXXXXXX
...TO STIR UP SOME STIMULA-TION IN THE DAYS AHEAD.
LET ME DO MY PART...

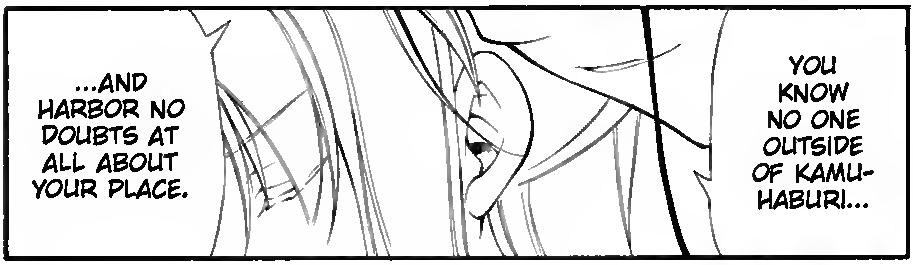
MAKING MY SCHEDULED REPORT.

BLOODY CROSS

Chapter 39
Brainwash


NOW...
...RELAX YOUR SHOULDERS...
KOTSU (TOK)
KOTSU
TO (PAT)
...AND AS ALWAYS, LISTEN CLOSELY TO MY VOICE...
...LADY TSUKIMIYA.
ONE
TWO
THREE


YOU ARE KAMU-HABURI'S UNIT FOUR CAPTAIN.
...I...AM... KAMU-HABURI'S UNIT FOUR... CAPTAIN.
YOU ARE MY SUPERIOR OFFICER...
...AND A WISE WOMAN WHO FAITH-FULLY AND THOROUGHLY COMPLETES HER MISSIONS.


YOU KNOW NO ONE OUTSIDE OF KAMU-HABURI...
...AND HARBOR NO DOUBTS AT ALL ABOUT YOUR PLACE.

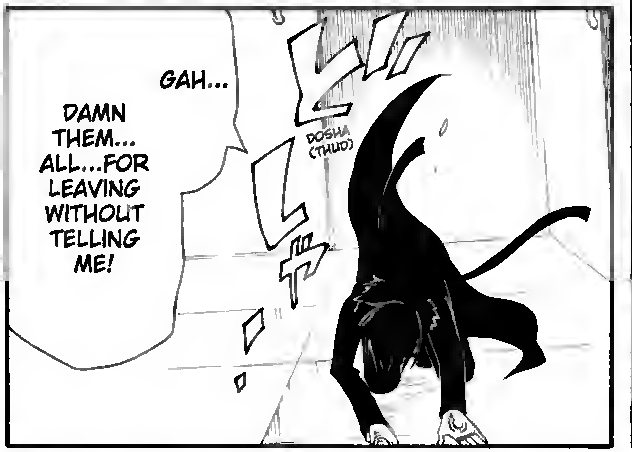
A LOVELY CAGED BIRD WHO HAS FORGOTTEN HOW TO FLY...
THAT IS WHAT YOU ARE.
UNH ...
TSU (STROKE)

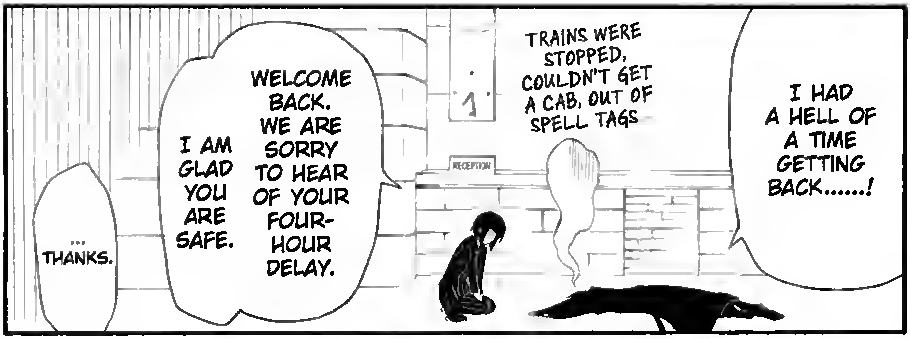
WHAT IS IT, MISS MARIANNE? I WAS JUST GETTING TO THE GOOD PART.
THAT WAS A RATHER CLOSE CALL DURING THE BATTLE LAST NIGHT.
SAY, RIDO...
TOTE (TODDLE)
TOTE
I BELIEVE HIS NAME IS HINATA.
AH, YES... THAT BOY...
...SHE WAS TRYING TO LISTEN TO WHAT HER FORMER COMRADE HAD TO SAY, RIGHT?
EVEN THOUGH THE BRAIN-WASHING HELD...
THANK YOU, MISS MARI-ANNE.
I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE!
EH
HEH!
TRUE. CONSIDERING WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS...
...PERHAPS TIGHTER CONDITIONING IS NECESSARY.
MM...
I THINK HER COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANIZATION MIGHT BE GROWING SHAKY!
IN THAT CASE .....
VERY WELL.

...SHALL WE AMPLIFY THE CONDITIONING SPELL?
THE STRAIN ON HER WILL INCREASE, BUT...SHE SHOULD BE ALL RIGHT.
SHURU CYANO
GUBA (GLOOSH)
LET'S ADD ANOTHER PARASITE TO THE MARK.
GUGU (GURGLE)
OKAY!
FOR STRENGTHENING...
...WE WILL IMPLANT AN ADDITIONAL BEAST OF GREATER INFLUENCE.

GO ON, ENTER HER.
...NH!!
ZUBU (VNSHD
AHH ...!
ZU (AHHH)
ZU
ZU
HOW MANY HAS IT BEEN...?
NO MATTER HOW OFTEN I HEAR IT, HER AGONY IS EXQUISITE.
OH ...!
(ZUPU (BLUP)
ZUPU
AHH... YOU ARE MY SWEET CAGED BIRD.
I SHALL KEEP SHOWER-ING YOU WITH MY LOVE... LADY TSUKI-MIYA.

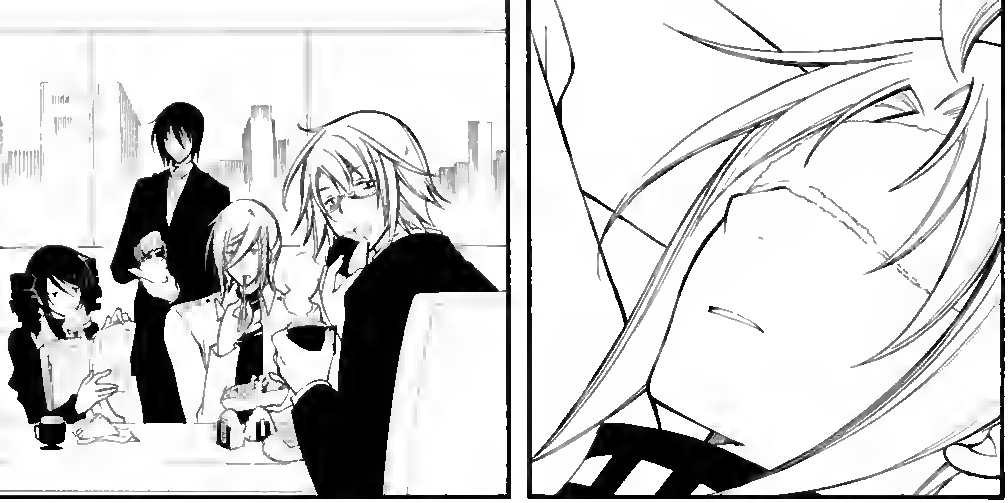
HAFF...


GAH...
DAMN THEM... ALL...FOR LEAVING WITHOUT TELLING ME!
DOSHA (THUD)


I HAD A HELL OF A TIME GETTING BACK.....!
TRAINS WERE STOPPED, COULDN'T GET A CAB, OUT OF SPELL TAGS
WELCOME BACK. WE ARE SORRY TO HEAR OF YOUR FOUR-HOUR DELAY.
I AM GLAD YOU ARE SAFE.
... THANKS.
RECEPTION

HOW DARE YOU LEAVE ME BEHIND!?
ALL RIGHT, YOU BAS-TARDS!
BAN (SLAM)

MEETING ROOM 2
ZUKA (STOMP)
ZUKA
ZUKA



WANT A RICE BALL?
...OH. WELCOME BACK.

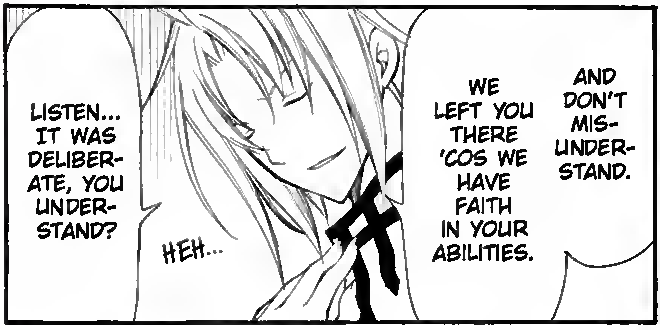
OH, SORRY. YOU HAD THE MOST EASILY SMACKABLE FACE.
I CAN SEE THAT.
GO (RMBL) GO
GO GO
WHAT WAS THAT FOR!?

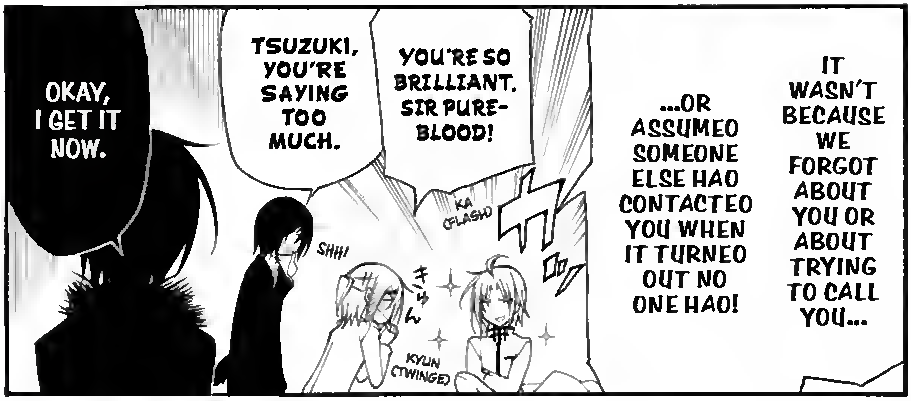
OW!
BESHI (WHAP)

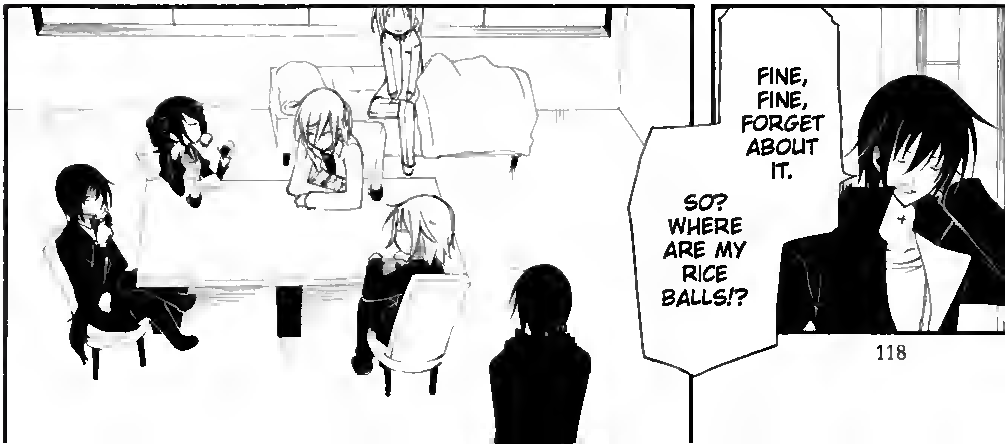
YOU THERE! FORGET THAT AND LISTEN TO MY OUTRAGE!!
BI (POINT)
SURE. IF IT'S A HAMWICH.
HEY, WOULD ANYONE MIND TRADING A RICE BALL FOR MY SANDWICH?

PURE-BLOOD ...
I'M GLAD YOU MADE IT BACK SAFE, HINATA.
...SORRY I STUCK YOU WITH A FRUIT-LESS ASSIGN-MENT.

CALM DOWN.

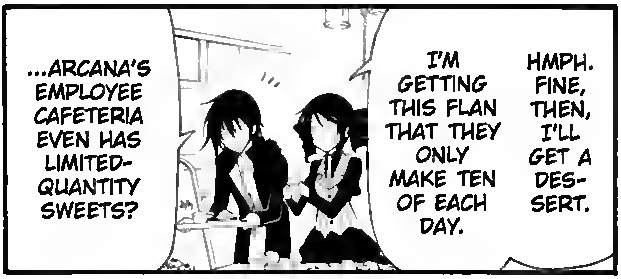

LISTEN... IT WAS DELIBER-ATE, YOU UNDER-STAND?
HEH...
WE LEFT YOU THERE 'COS WE HAVE FAITH IN YOUR ABILITIES.
AND DON'T MIS-UNDER-STAND.


OKAY, I GET IT NOW.
TSUZUKI, YOU'RE SAYING TOO MUCH.
YOU'RE SO BRILLIANT, SIR PURE-BLOOD!
KA (CLASH)
SHH!
KYUN (TWINGE)
...OR ASSUMED SOMEONE ELSE HAD CONTACTED YOU WHEN IT TURNED OUT NO ONE HAD!
IT WASN'T BECAUSE WE FORGOT ABOUT YOU OR ABOUT TRYING TO CALL YOU...


FINE, FINE, FORGET ABOUT IT.
SO? WHERE ARE MY RICE BALLS!?

ARCANA EMPLOYEE CAFETERIA
WHY AM I HERE?
GEEZ... WOULD YOU PLEASE STOP PROJECTING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS?
THOUGH IT IS QUITE STIMULATING.
THEY CAN ALL GO IMPLODE SOMEWHERE.

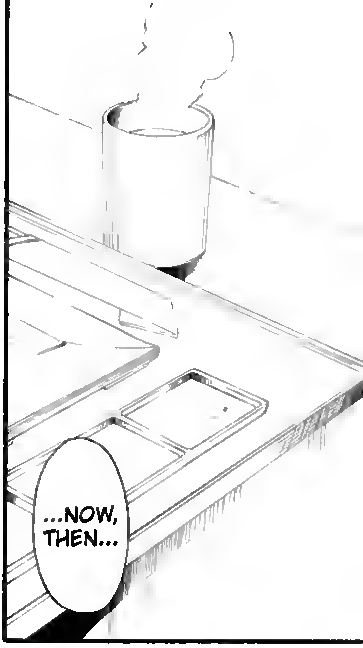
'SCUSE ME, ONE GREEN TEA BUBBLE TEA!
I'M BEING TOTALLY IGNORED!
LIKE JAPANESE-STYLE HAMBURG STEAK WITH GRATED VEGGIES
I THINK I MIGHT EAT HERE INSTEAD OF GETTING TAKEOUT.
HO HO.
WHAT I ACTUALLY MEAN IS, DO CONTINUE!
DOYAA (LEER)


...ARCANA'S EMPLOYEE CAFETERIA EVEN HAS LIMITED-QUANTITY SWEETS?
I'M GETTING THIS FLAN THAT THEY ONLY MAKE TEN OF EACH DAY.
HMPH. FINE, THEN, I'LL GET A DES-SERT.

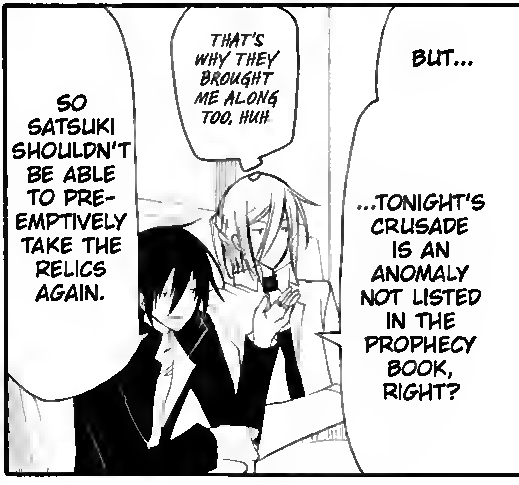
PACKAGE: LIMITED!

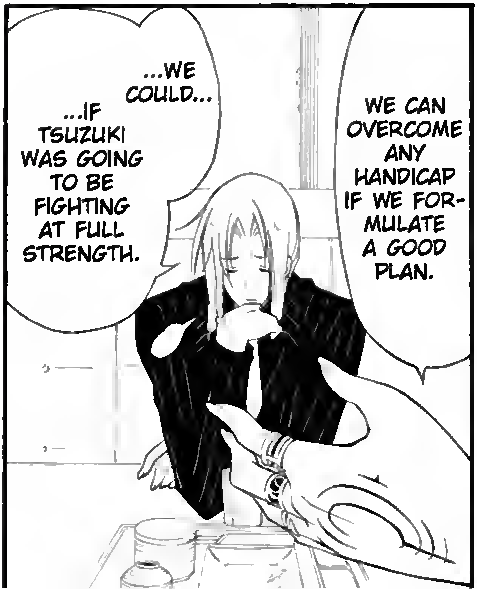
I'LL HAVE THE LIMITED VIP SECRET MENU PREMIUM-GRADE MARBLED WAGYU MEAL SET.
GI (GLARE)
THAT AIN'T JUST *FEEL LIKE A VIP*!
THAT'S OUT-RIGHT CLASS-ISM!!

I WANTED TO SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT TONIGHT'S CRUSADE WITHOUT TSUZUKI AROUND.
I HAVE PERMISSION FROM HIS ATTENDANT TO DO SO.
...!


...NOW, THEN...

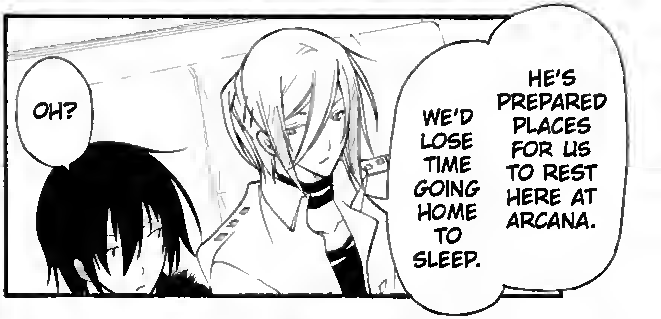
KA-NADE.
KAMU-HABURI'S STATUS?
YES...GIVEN THE RELATIVELY MINOR CLASHES OF LAST NIGHT'S BATTLE, I DOUBT THEY'VE SUFFERED SERIOUS CASUALTIES.
SO THEY'RE LIKELY IN THE SAME STATE AS YESTERDAY... AND WE'RE STILL AT A DISADVAN-TAGE.

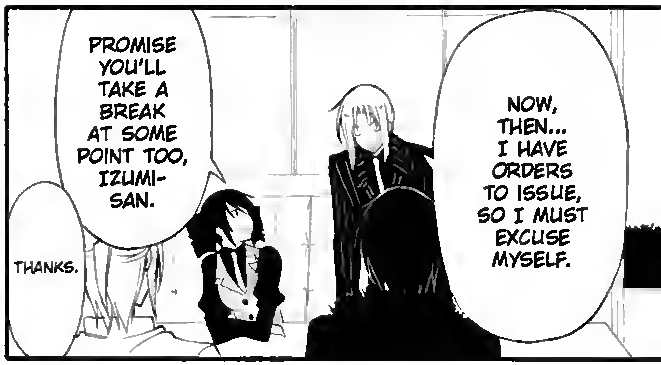

BUT...
...TONIGHT'S CRUSADE IS AN ANOMALY NOT LISTED IN THE PROPHECY BOOK, RIGHT?
THAT'S WHY THEY BROUGHT ME ALONG TOO, HUH
SO SATSUKI SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO PRE-EMPTIVELY TAKE THE RELICS AGAIN.


WE CAN OVERCOME ANY HANDICAP IF WE FOR-MULATE A GOOD PLAN.
...WE COULD...
...IF TSUZUKI WAS GOING TO BE FIGHTING AT FULL STRENGTH.

...SIR PURE-BLOOD'S CONDITION IS THAT BAD?
WELL...
...HE'S JUST FORCING HIMSELF TO ACT NORMAL, RIGHT? IT'S ALL A BLUFF.
THERE-FORE...
...WE MUST STRATEGIZE UNDER THE ASSUMP-TION THAT TSUZUKI IS AT REDUCED CAPACITY.
THAT IS TO SAY, COULD YOU TRY TO PREVENT TSUZUKI FROM OVER-EXERTING HIMSELF?
FRANKLY, I'D PREFER HE NOT PARTICIPATE THIS TIME AT ALL, BUT HE NIXED THAT NOTION IMMEDIATELY.
AH...
...MY SIGHT!!
GET OUTTA...
IT WILL ALL BE FOR NAUGHT IF TSUZUKI DIES AND THE CRUSADES CEASE...BUT HE SEEMS BLIND TO THAT POSSIBILITY.
OR, MAYBE HE'S TOO AWARE OF HIS ROLE AS "SIR GOD CANDIDATE."
ZU! (SLURP)
WHEN ALL YOUR TROOPS ARE LICKING THEIR WOUNDS...
...MORALE'S NOT GONNA INCREASE IF THEY HEAR, "SORRY, THE WOUNDED ADMIRAL IS HAVING A REST."
.....

WHAT ABOUT SATSU-KI?
NOTHING WORTH REPORTING RIGHT NOW.
THOUGH I HOPE TO HAVE USEFUL INTEL BY EVENING.
ALL OF YOU REST UP AND RECUPER-ATE UNTIL THEN.


OH?
WE'D LOSE TIME GOING HOME TO SLEEP.
HE'S PREPARED PLACES FOR US TO REST HERE AT ARCANA.


PROMISE YOU'LL TAKE A BREAK AT SOME POINT TOO, IZUMI-SAN.
THANKS.
NOW, THEN... I HAVE ORDERS TO ISSUE, SO I MUST EXCUSE MYSELF.

YAWN ...

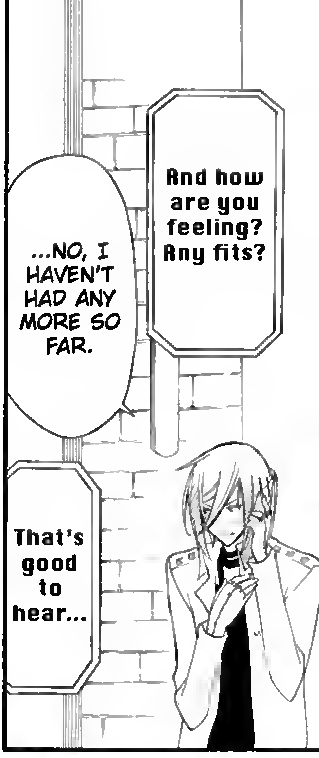
I DON'T THINK HE'S HAD MUCH REST— IF ANY.
.....
AND NOW HE'S GOT WRAP-UP AND TONIGHT'S PREP.
...HE WAS COMMAND-ING EACH SITE FROM HERE DURING LAST NIGHT'S CRUSADE.

WELL, I'M OFF TO GET SOME SLEEP.
SEE YOU TONIGHT, YOU TWO.
LATER!
HAAH... I'M WIPED.
THE CRU-SADES ...
LET'S HEAD TO OUR MAKESHIFT BEDROOM TOO.
GATA (CLATTER)
... SURE.
SHE SAID SATSUKI SUPPRESSED MY FITS AND BOUGHT ME SOME TIME...
...BUT I BET IT'S JUST A TEMPORARY FIX. THE DIVINE POWER JUST FORCED THE CURSE MARK'S PROGRESSION TO FREEZE.
LIKE WEDGING A ROCK TO JAM THE COGS OF A GEARBOX.
IT'LL FAIL BEFORE TOO LONG.
EITHER THE ROCK WILL SHATTER AND THE GEARS WILL START MOVING AGAIN...
...OR THE GEARS THEM-SELVES WILL BREAK...

EITHER THE NEXT FIT WILL KILL ME...OR...
THE CURSE MARK WILL PROBABLY FLARE UP AGAIN ONCE TONIGHT'S CRUSADE WRAPS UP. I HAVE TO SETTLE THINGS BY THEN.
...IT'S A...
...PERSONAL CALL. YOU GO ON AHEAD.
PI (BEEP)
HUH?
RIIING...
RIIING...
YOU'RE NOT GONNA ANSWER?
.....
...MY BODY ITSELF WILL FALL APART FROM HAVING BEEN MEDDLED WITH...
RIIING...
HELLO!?
GAN (SHOCK)
GIMME A SEC, I GOTTA FIND SOMEWHERE TO TALK.
SUTA (STRIDE)
HEY!
SUTA
.....UH, BUT...
...I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE ROOM IS!
I TOLD YOU I'D HELP, BUT IF YOU KEEP CALLING SO MUCH, I'LL BE FOUND OUT!
...HEY.
KYORO (GLANCE)
TCH... STUPID CAT.
CALLING WITHOUT ANY REGARD FOR WHAT'S CONVENIENT FOR ME.

Oh, I'm awfully sorry about that.
THIS VOICE...!
Well...
...WE'LL PRACTICE RESTRAINT FROM NOW ON, SO BEAR WITH US.
SATSUKI...!
...I never imagined you'd be calling me yourself.
SURPRISED? WELL... I WANTED TO GIVE YOU A LITTLE PEP TALK.
YOU DID WELL IN THE LAST CRUSADE.
WE FAILED TO KILL TSUZUKI THANKS TO KAMUHABURI'S BUNGLING, BUT...
...BECAUSE OF YOU, WE DEALT HIM A SERIOUS BLOW.
THANK YOU, NAO. GOOD WORK.

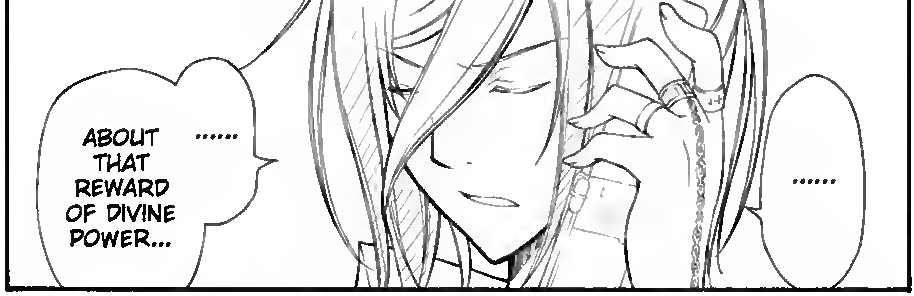
...AND REMADE IT INTO SPECIAL DIVINE POWER THAT COULD STOP THE CURSE MARK FITS ESPECIALLY FOR YOU.
...RE-SEARCHED AND RE-WROTE ITS CONFIGU-RATION...
...CONSID-ERING I WRUNG DIVINE POWER FROM THE PRECIOUS BOOK OF DA'AT...


And how are you feeling? Any fits?
...NO, I HAVEN'T HAD ANY MORE SO FAR.
That's good to hear...

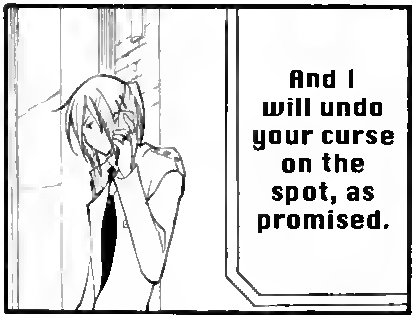
...AND I HAD TO FEED IT FIVE VICTIMS BEFORE IT WAS FINALLY MOLLIFIED.
THE BOOK OF DA'AT GOT MAD...
THE ALTER-ATION WAS A BIT TRICKY.
BOKO (GURGL)
BOKO

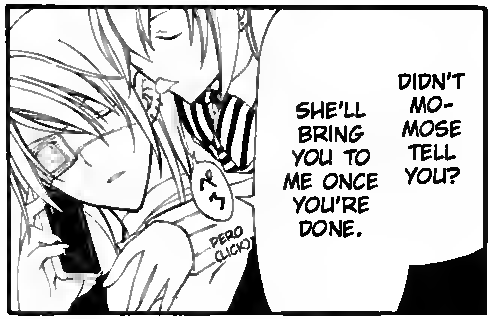
...IF IT BENEFITS YOU...
BUT THAT'S BUT A SMALL SACRI-FICE...

...you will be killing Tsuzuki during tonight's Crusade.
.....
You see, though it be indi-rectly...


ABOUT THAT REWARD OF DIVINE POWER...
.....
.....

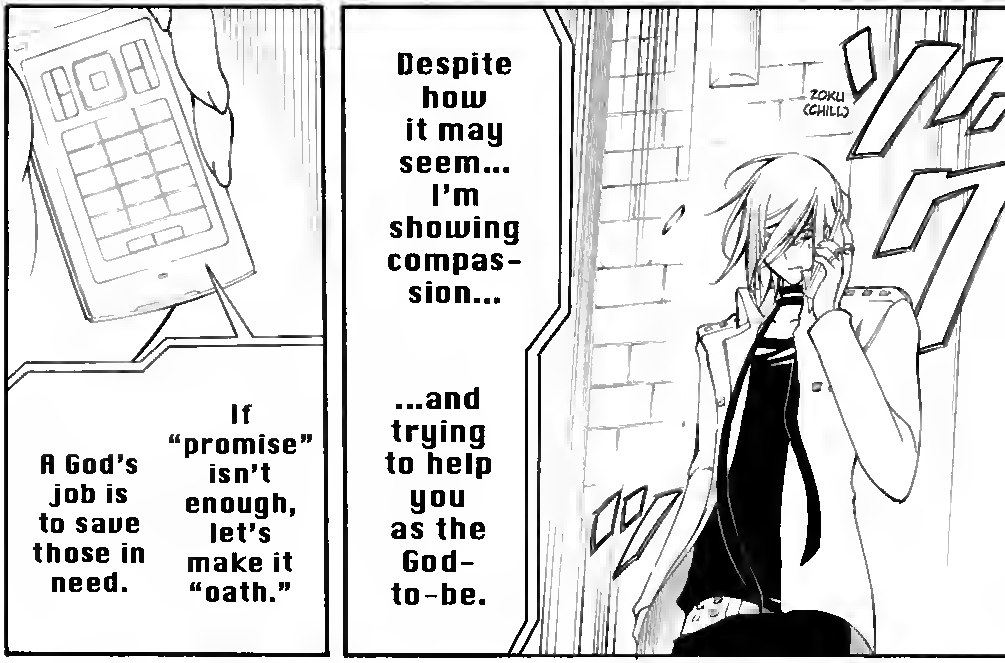
I won't stand for another lie.
You... had better hand it over this time.

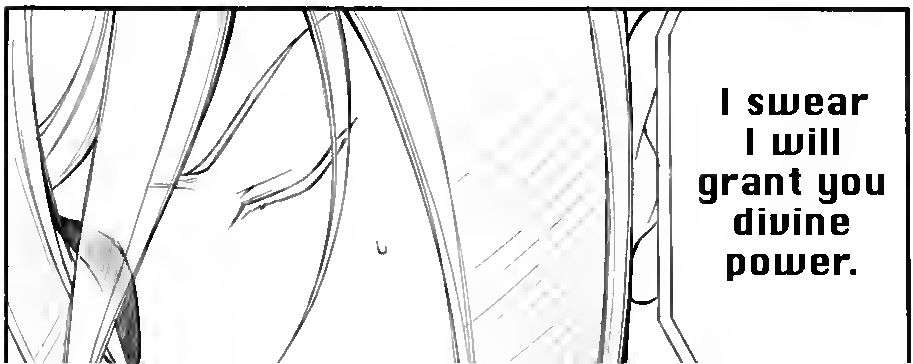

And I will undo your curse on the spot, as promised.


DIDN'T MO-MOSE TELL YOU?
SHE'LL BRING YOU TO ME ONCE YOU'RE DONE.
PERO CLICK!

...I CAN'T HELP BUT WON-DER IF...
...WHAT REALLY SUITS YOU BEST IS TO USE AND MANIPU-LATE ME TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT ...
...WITHOUT GIVING ME ANOTHER OUNCE OF DIVINE POWER.
You know I'm going to die anyway if you leave me be.
...YOU KNOW, NAO...

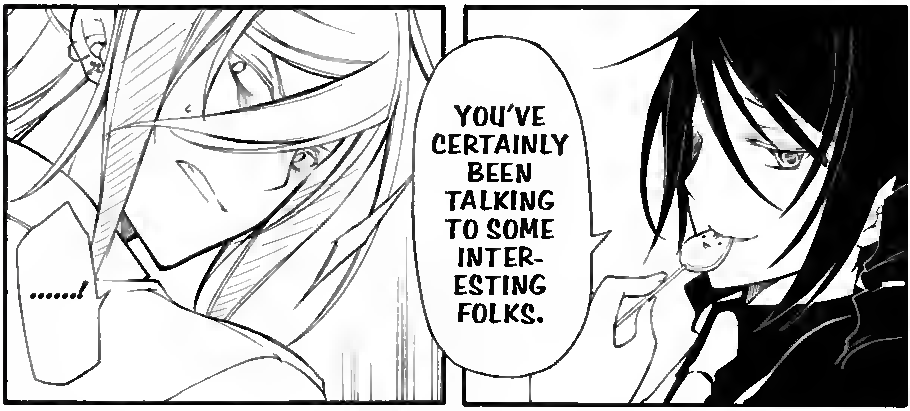
...I WOULDN'T DISPARAGE ME IF I WERE YOU.

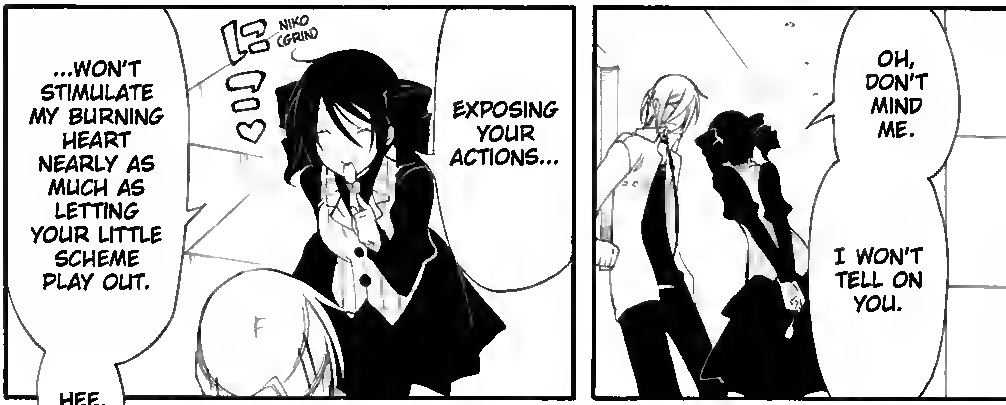

Despite how it may seem... I'm showing compas-sion...
...and trying to help you as the God-to-be.
ZOKU (CHILL)
If "promise" isn't enough, let's make it "oath."
A God's job is to save those in need.


I swear I will grant you divine power.

.....ALL RIGHT.
I TRUST YOU.
THOUGH THE SENTIMENT HARDLY MATTERS...
...WHEN I HAVE NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE.
PUTSU (BOOP)
GOT IT.
YEAH.
...and relay my instructions once I've gauged the situation.
Momose will call you...
Good boy.
So we'll meet tonight.
ONCE AGAIN.....
...I'LL BE BETRAYING TSUZUKI TO HELP SATSUKI...
KATSU (CLICK)

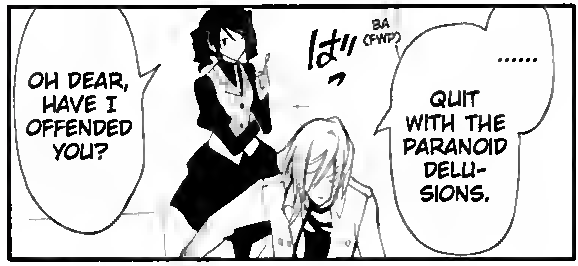
カツ
KATSU (TAK)
MY, MY...


YOU'VE CERTAINLY BEEN TALKING TO SOME INTER-ESTING FOLKS.
.....!

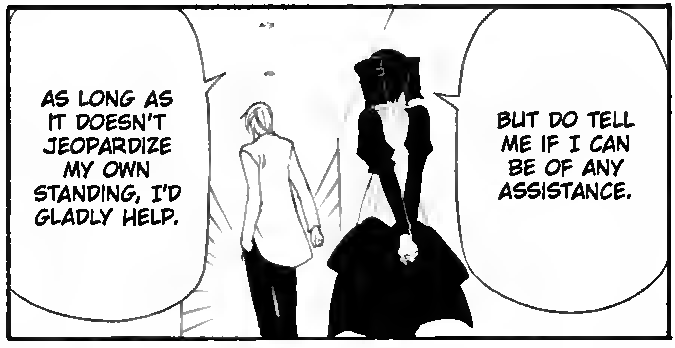

OH, DON'T MIND ME.
I WON'T TELL ON YOU.
NIKO (GRIN)
EXPOSING YOUR ACTIONS...
...WON'T STIMULATE MY BURNING HEART NEARLY AS MUCH AS LETTING YOUR LITTLE SCHEME PLAY OUT.
HEE.

BI (JAB)
SAY. THE MYSTERIOUS POWER THAT DOWNED TSUZUKI'S BARRIER LAST NIGHT...
THAT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT?

HEE HEE!
I'M SORRY.
WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THAT IT WASN'T.


BA (FWP)
.....
QUIT WITH THE PARANOID DELUSIONS.
OH DEAR, HAVE I OFFENDED YOU?

OH.

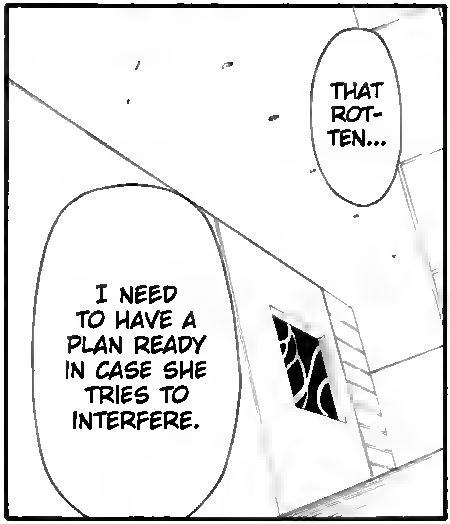

AS LONG AS IT DOESN'T JEOPARDIZE MY OWN STANDING, I'D GLADLY HELP.
BUT DO TELL ME IF I CAN BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE.

HMM?
SHE'S...

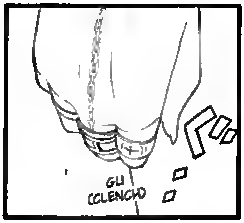
THEN AGAIN, PERHAPS YOU'LL BE THE ONE LENDING ME A HAND INSTEAD.

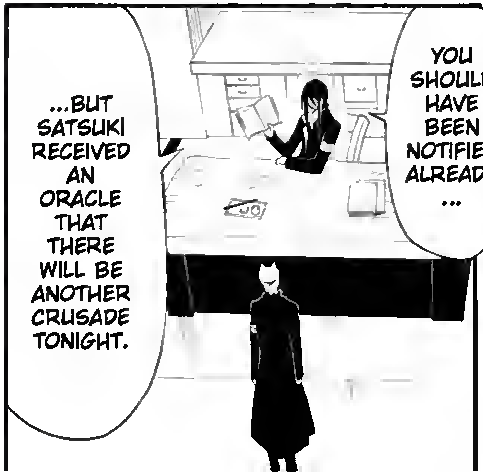
DON'T GIVE ME THAT SCARY FACE.
IT WILL ONLY STIMULATE ME MORE.

...TRYING TO BLACK-MAIL ME IN EXCHANGE FOR HER SILENCE...


THAT ROT-TEN...
I NEED TO HAVE A PLAN READY IN CASE SHE TRIES TO INTERFERE.

HEE.
WELL, THEN, I'LL SEE YOU LATER.
PLEAS-ANT DREAMS TO YOU.

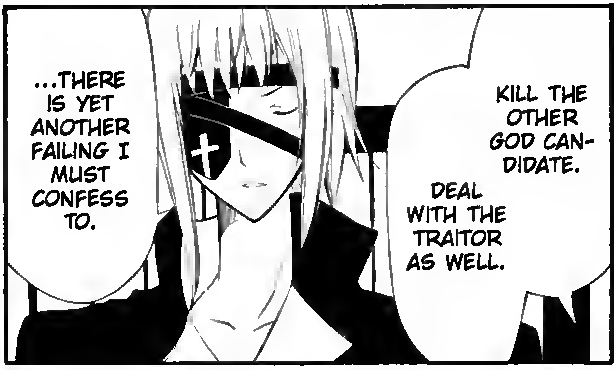

GU
CCLENCHO


...BUT SATSUKI RECEIVED AN ORACLE THAT THERE WILL BE ANOTHER CRUSADE TONIGHT.
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED ALREADY ...

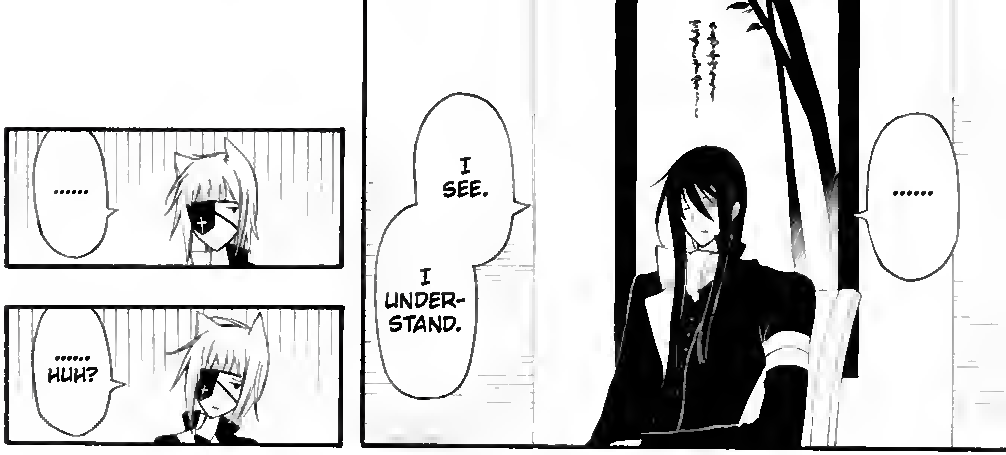
THIS IRREGULAR CHRONOLOGY IS LIKELY A CONSEQUENCE OF SATSUKI PREEMPTIVELY SWIPING THE LAST TWO RELICS.
HE REALLY IS A TRYING GOD CANDI-DATE...
...MAKING A MESS OF THE SACRED CRUSADES.

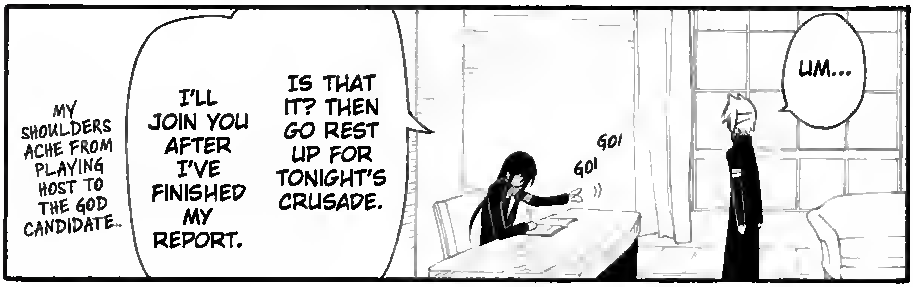
SU (SSK)
す！

...WE DID NOT PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS LAST NIGHT, BUT...
...WE WILL RECTIFY THAT FAILING TO-NIGHT.
PASHI (SNATCH)
はし


KILL THE OTHER GOD CAN-DIDATE.
DEAL WITH THE TRAITOR AS WELL.
...THERE IS YET ANOTHER FAILING I MUST CONFESS TO.

WHEN WE CORNERED THE GOD CANDIDATE IN THE CHAPEL...
...KANADE... THAT TRAITOR... TOOK ONE OF OURS HOSTAGE...
I PRIORI-TIZED OUR COMRADE'S LIFE...
...AND LET KANADE ESCAPE.


.....
.....
HUH?
I SEE.
I UNDER-STAND.
.....

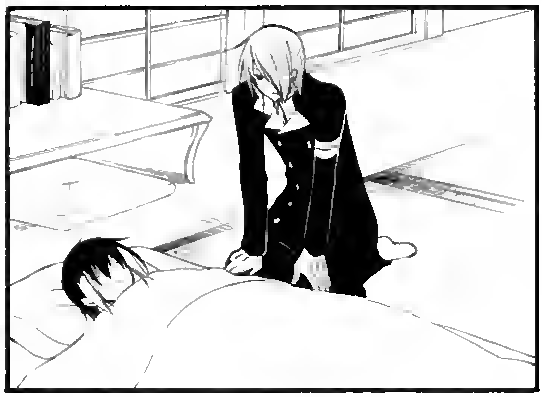

MY SHOULDERS ACHE FROM PLAYING HOST TO THE GOD CANDIDATE..
I'LL JOIN YOU AFTER I'VE FINISHED MY REPORT.
IS THAT IT? THEN GO REST UP FOR TONIGHT'S CRUSADE.
GO!
GO!
UM...

TON (TAP)
OH, AND...
I'M NOT GOING TO YELL AT YOU, THOUGH I'M NOT GOING TO PRAISE YOU EITHER.
...WHAT IS IT? IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE? DO YOU WANT A STERN LECTURE?
.....

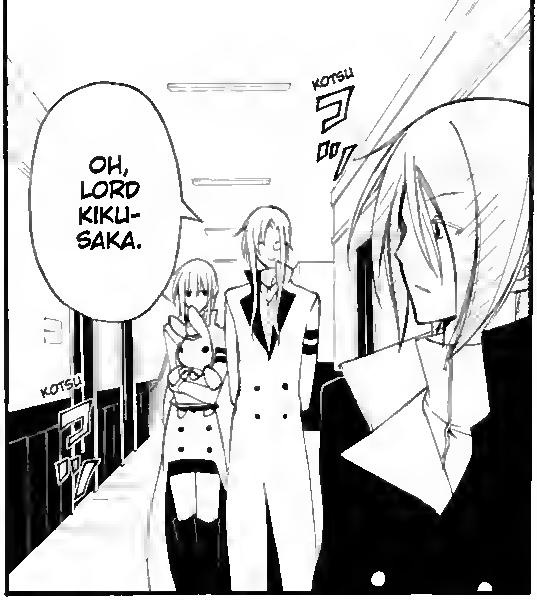
...GO LOOK IN ON HIM.
.....!
HE'S PROBA-BLY TAKEN HIM TO HIS ROOM BY NOW.
...JUST NOW, KIKUSAKA RETURNED WITH SETSU SAFELY IN TOW.

.....
...YES, SIR.
...PHEW.

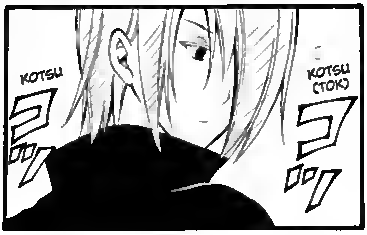
SETSU
.....

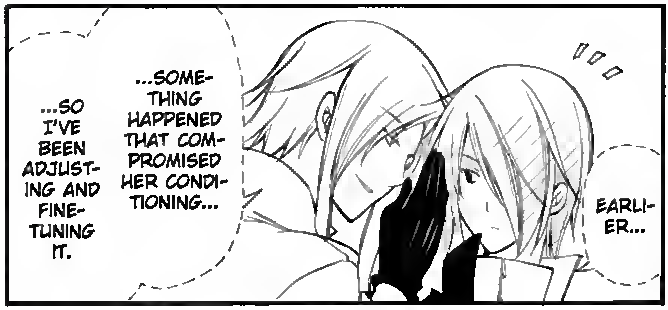


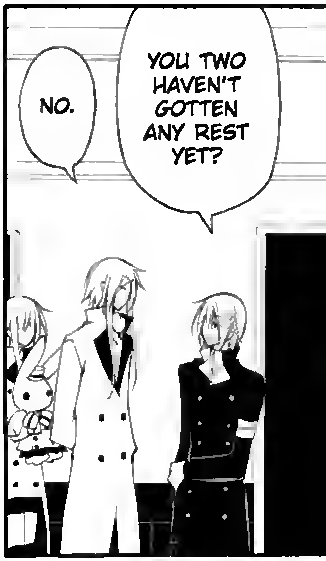
I'M GLAD YOU MADE IT BACK ALIVE.
I'M SO SORRY I ALMOST SACRIFICED YOU.

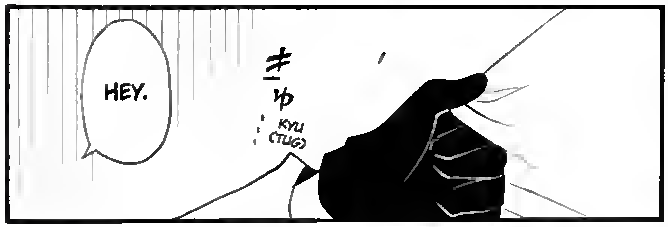

KOTSU
コツ
OH, LORD KIKU-SAKA.
KOTSU
コツ

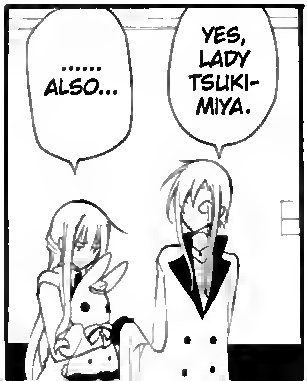
パタン
PATAN (SHUT)


KOTSU
コツ
KOTSU (TOK)
コツ


...SO I'VE BEEN ADJUST-ING AND FINE-TUNING IT.
...SOME-THING HAPPENED THAT COM-PROMISED HER CONDI-TIONING...
EARLI-ER...


NO.
YOU TWO HAVEN'T GOTTEN ANY REST YET?


HEY.
キュ
KYU (TUG)


YES, LADY TSUKI-MIYA.
..... ALSO...

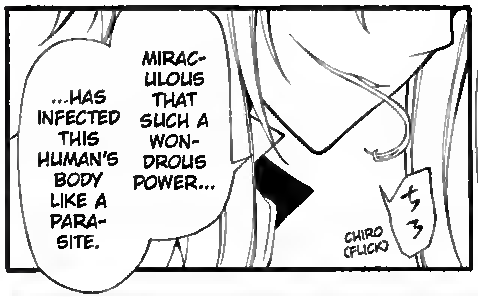
RIDO.
'M SLEEPY... I WANNA GO BACK TO MY ROOM.

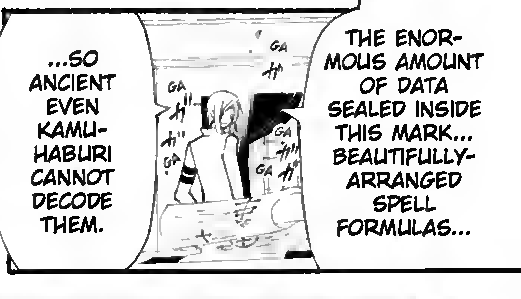
I HATE EVERY-ONE ELSE...
EVERY-ONE ELSE IS BAD... AND SCARY...
...I-I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN YOU WHISPER BEHIND MY BACK.
YOU WORK FOR ME, RIGHT, RIDO?
RIDO ...
... YOU ...
WHAT THE...? SHE'S ACTING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM YESTERDAY!?
GYO (GAPE)
ギョっ
..... WHA ...!?
IT'S GOING TO PUT TOO MUCH STRESS ON HER BRAIN!
...AMPED IT UP TO THE POINT OF ERASING HER PER-SONALITY!?

SHE'S THE ONE WHO BEARS THE MARK!
WE NEED HER READY TO BE USED AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE...!
RELAX.
THE STRAIN IS NOT SO VERY IMMENSE.
I MERELY DIMMED HER REASONING AND MADE HER MORE JUVENILE.
?
...WE'RE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT HER, NOT TREAT HER LIKE A CRIMINAL.
I CAN'T ALLOW THIS DEGREE OF MENTAL ALTERATION.
OF COURSE NOT.
IT'S AN EXTREME MEASURE USED ONLY...
...WHEN SHE HAS CONTACT WITH HER FORMER ALLIES.
I'LL ADJUST IT SO SHE'LL HAVE GREATER LIBERTY...
...LORD KIKU-
SHALL WE, LADY TSUKI-MIYA?
YEAH.
.....
THAT'S SICK.

UNIT FOUR OFFICE
NOW, LADY TSUKIMIYA...
...LET ME EXAMINE YOU BEFORE YOU HAVE YOUR NAP.
PI (BEEP)
PI
MAY I TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR MARK?
OKAY.
SURU (SHFF)
IS THIS GOOD?
PIPI
...IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL.
NO MATTER HOW OFTEN I LOOK AT IT...
THAT MARK...

GA (VWRO)
GA
GA
PIIII (BEEP)
UNABLE TO DECODE


...HAS INFECTED THIS HUMAN'S BODY LIKE A PARA-SITE.
MIRAC-ULOUS THAT SUCH A WON-DROUS POWER...
CHIRO (FLICK)

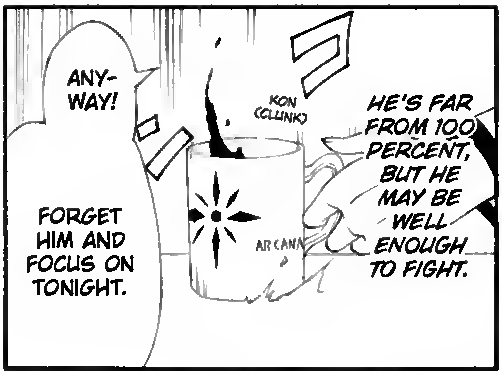

...SO ANCIENT EVEN KAMU-HABURI CANNOT DECODE THEM.
GA
THE ENOR-MOUS AMOUNT OF DATA SEALED INSIDE THIS MARK... BEAUTIFULLY-ARRANGED SPELL FORMULAS...

AHH. WHEN...?
I LONG FOR THE DAY...
...WHEN ALL THIS BECOMES MINE TO DO WITH AS I PLEASE!

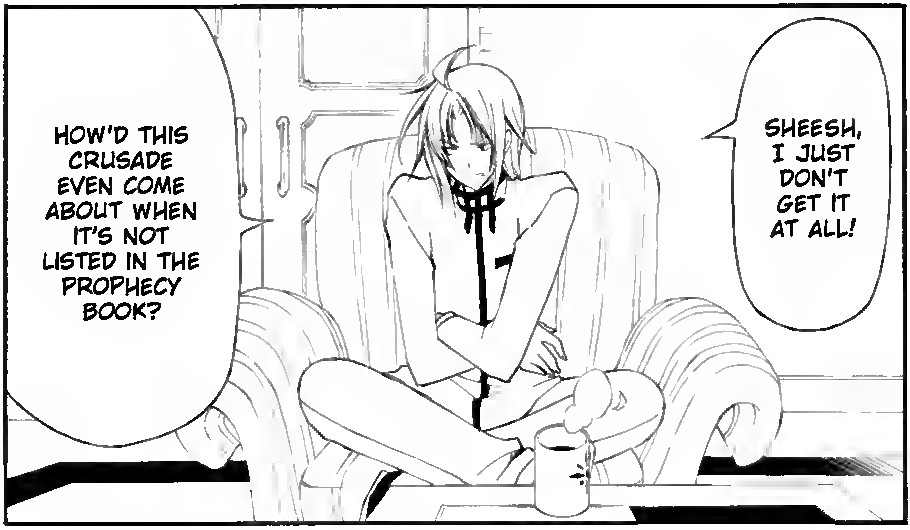
BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

DOSA
DOSA (FWAP)
WHEW...
BACK AT LAST.
OHH...? I THOUGHT YOUR ROOM LOOKED EMPTY WHEN I WALKED BY. YOU WERE OUT?
YUP.
USED UP MY SPELL TAGS LAST NIGHT, SO I WENT HOME TO RESTOCK...
YOU'RE STILL OKAY ON TAGS, NAO—
HMM?
HUH? HE GO OUT TOO?
HE WAS ALREADY GONE WHEN I WOKE UP.
WELL, IT'S ONLY SEVEN O'CLOCK.
IF HE HASN'T RETURNED BY 2100 HOURS, WE'LL GIVE HIM A CALL AND SUMMON HIM.
ZU (SIP)
Made-to-order thrones ¥190,000
THE GOOD MONARCH MONTHLY

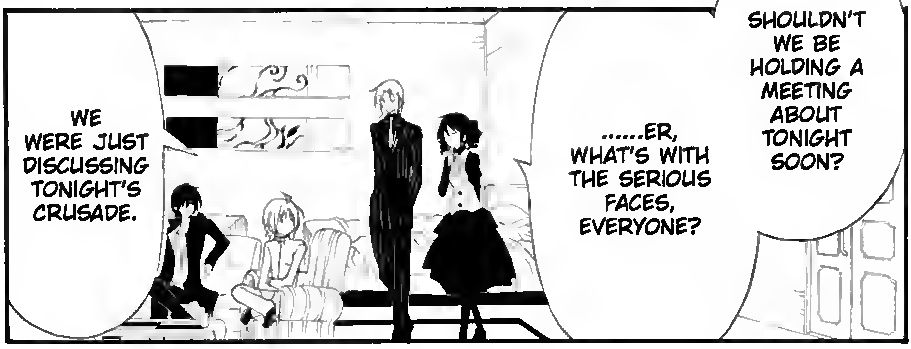

ANY-WAY!
FORGET HIM AND FOCUS ON TONIGHT.
KON (CLUNK)
ARCANA
HE'S FAR FROM 100 PERCENT, BUT HE MAY BE WELL ENOUGH TO FIGHT.

.....TSUZUKI'S RECOVERED BETTER THAN I EXPECTED.


HOW'D THIS CRUSADE EVEN COME ABOUT WHEN IT'S NOT LISTED IN THE PROPHECY BOOK?
SHEESH, I JUST DON'T GET IT AT ALL!

KON
KON
SINCE IT'S UNPREC-EDENTED, THERE'S NO WAY TO EVEN GUESS...
WHO KNOWS... I WONDER ...
TCH.
WE HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING FUNNY ON OUR SIDE, SO...
...WAS IT SOMETHING SATSUKI'S SIDE DID?

Chapter 40
The Secret


SHOULDN'T WE BE HOLDING A MEETING ABOUT TONIGHT SOON?
.....ER, WHAT'S WITH THE SERIOUS FACES, EVERYONE?
WE WERE JUST DISCUSSING TONIGHT'S CRUSADE.

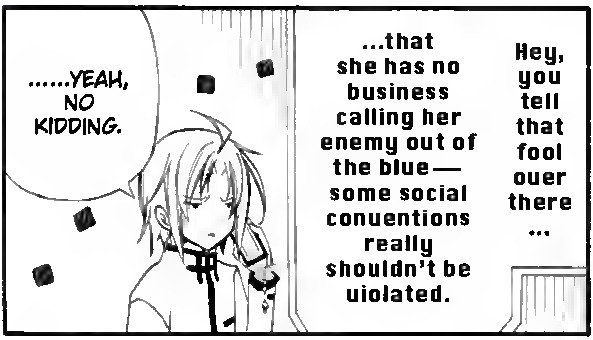
...KANADE, AS A FORMER KAMU-HABURI, KNOWS SOME-THING?
PER-HAPS...
OH MY... LET ME SEE...I PERSONALLY DON'T KNOW A THING, BUT...
WHO, ME?
SUCHA OKAO
...IF YOU WANT TO KNOW SO BADLY, WHY NOT JUST CALL AND ASK?
...MIGHT KNOW A THING OR TWO.
MY EX-SUPERI-OR...
EH?
PI PI PI (BEEP)

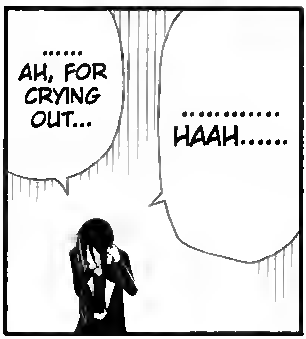
RIIING...
RIIING...
.....
SORRY, I HAVE A CALL—
UNH ...!
GRH...
Long time no see.
I called because the God candidate wants to ask you something.
HUH...?
MY, SOME-ONE'S CRANKY.
.....
You!
...You've got some nerve, calling me.

ER, UMM... AHEM.
THIS IS TOKIWA?

GOD CANDIDATE...? OH, TSUZUKI.
.....

IF THE SITUATION WERE NOT WHAT IT IS, I WOULD HAVE CALLED ON YOU PROPERLY, BUT.....
.....
WE'VE MET ONCE BUT NEVER SPOKEN.

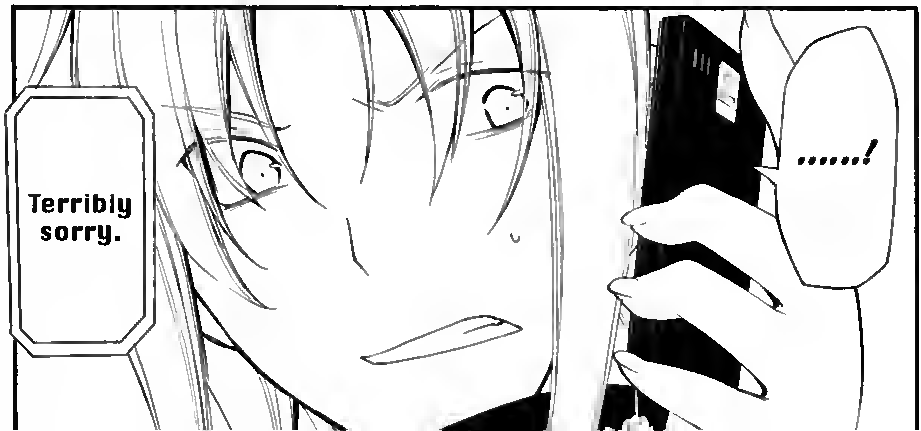

.....YEAH, NO KIDDING.
...that she has no business calling her enemy out of the blue— some social conuentions really shouldn't be uiolated.
Hey, you tell that fool ouer there ...


.....
AH, FOR CRYING OUT...
.....
HAAH.....

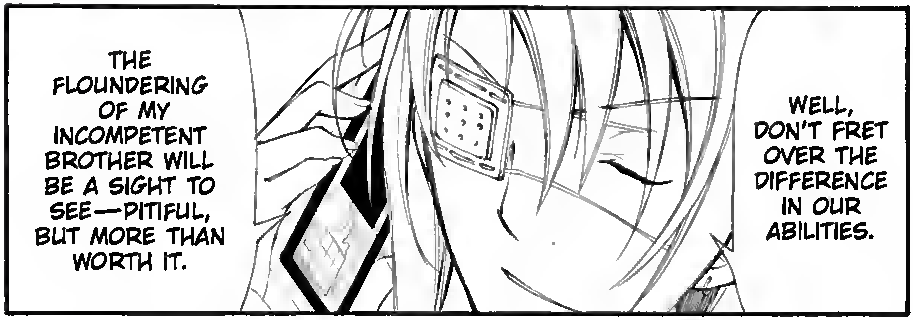
...WHEN SHE COULD VERY WELL MURDER YOU IN YOUR SLEEP SOMETIME DOWN THE ROAD.
...BUT I'D WORRY ABOUT KEEPING A WOMAN LIKE THAT IN YOUR MIDST...
I'M SURE YOU HAVE YOUR REASONS ...

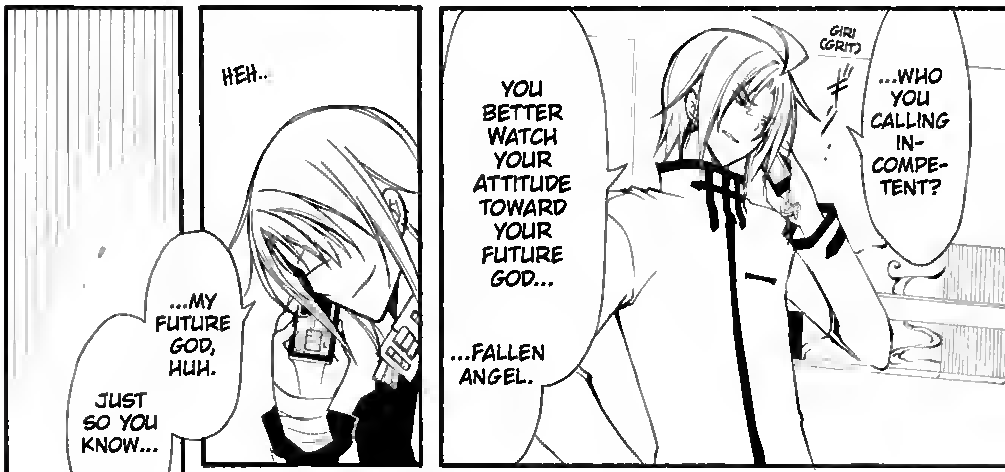
I WANTED TO ASK YOU WHY TONIGHT'S CRUSADE ISN'T GOING ACCORDING TO SCHEDULE!
...ANY-WAY!
I'LL BEAR THAT IN MIND.

...by taking the Divine Relics ahead of their sched-uled Crusade.
It's because I interfered and upset the Crusades' structure...

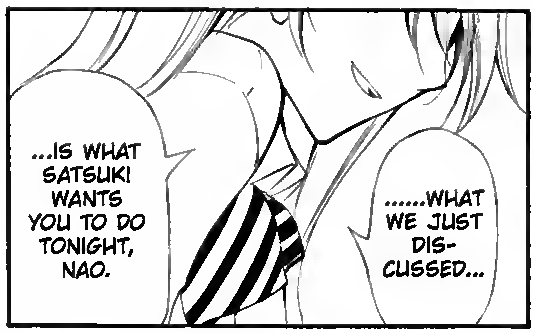

Terribly sorry.
.....!

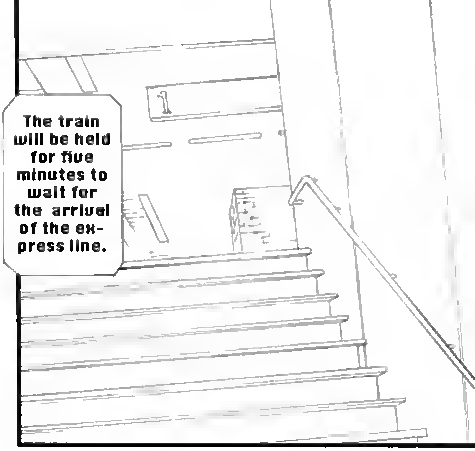
SATSUKI.....!!
I DID SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU AND DESTROYED THE NATURAL ORDER.


WELL, DON'T FRET OVER THE DIFFERENCE IN OUR ABILITIES.
THE FLOUNDERING OF MY INCOMPETENT BROTHER WILL BE A SIGHT TO SEE—PITIFUL, BUT MORE THAN WORTH IT.


GIRI (GRIT)
...WHO YOU CALLING IN-COMPE-TENT?
YOU BETTER WATCH YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUR FUTURE GOD...
...FALLEN ANGEL.
HEH..
...MY FUTURE GOD, HUH.
JUST SO YOU KNOW...

What about you? Found any secret plan to win against me?
.....
TCH!!
...I'VE ALREADY DISCOVERED A WAY TO KEEP THE CRUSADES GOING AND BECOME GOD EVEN AFTER I'VE KILLED YOU.
LOUD-MOUTH
BUTSU (CLICK)
QUIT TRYING TO ONE-UP ME, YOU STUPID-HEAD!!
GAA (SNARL)
HMPH!
OF COURSE I'VE GOT A WAY TO KILL YOU, KEEP THE CRUSADES GOING, AND BECOME GOD TOO!
INSIDE MY HEART...
.....
YOU DO?
HAAH...
HFF...

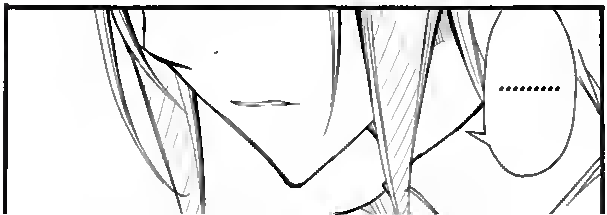

...IS WHAT SATSUKI WANTS YOU TO DO TONIGHT, NAO.
.....WHAT WE JUST DIS-CUSSED...


The train will be held for five minutes to wait for the arrival of the express line.

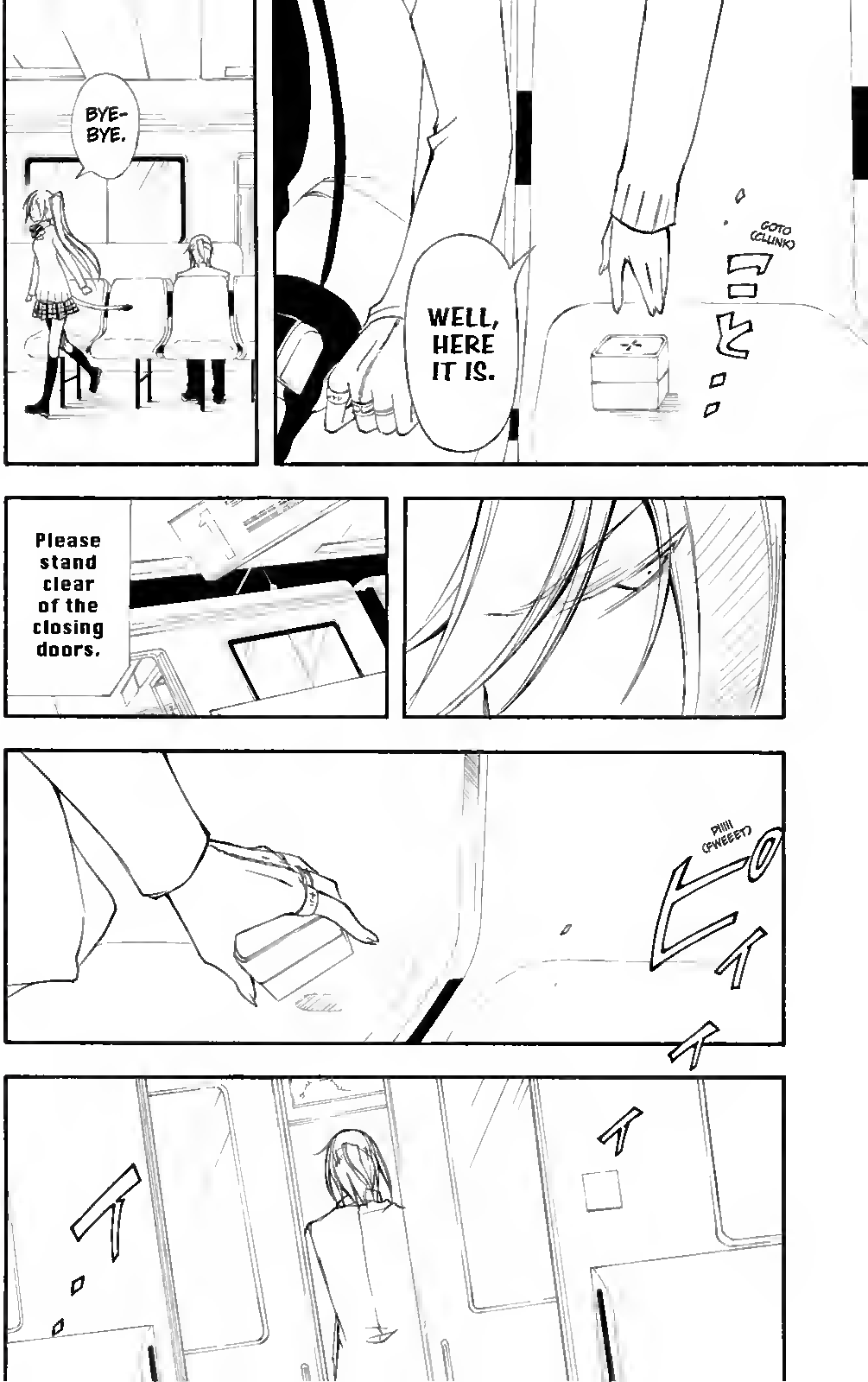
GOT IT?

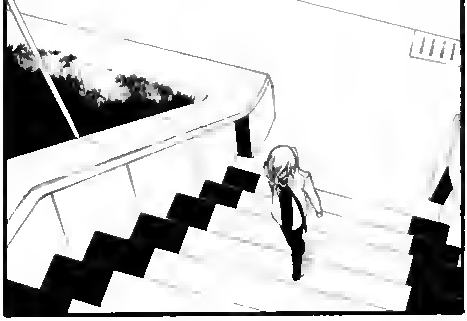
SATSUKI SAID HE'S GOT HIGH HOPES FOR YOU TOO! ♥

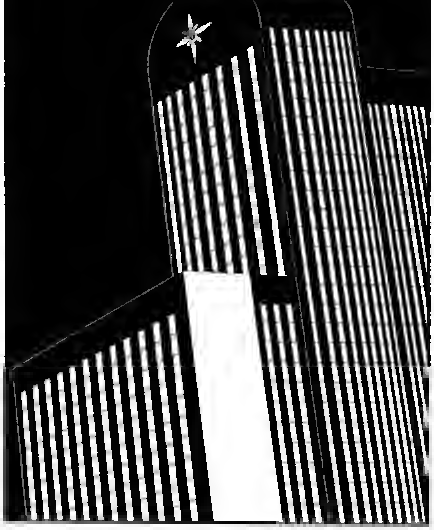
WHEN YOU'RE DONE, IT'LL REALLY BE BYE-BYE TO YOUR CURSE, SO WORK HARD!


.....

...AFTER THIS NEXT JOB, I DON'T THINK...
...I'LL BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO TSUZUKI.
HUH? IT'LL BE FINE. YOU WON'T BE FOUND OUT!
BEING FOUND OUT OR NOT ISN'T THE POINT.
...WHEN THIS IS OVER, I'M GONNA BREAK TIES WITH EVERYONE AND DIS-APPEAR.
I DON'T WANT TO BE USED BY OR MADE TO DECEIVE ANYONE ANYMORE.
OH! THEN MOMOSE WILL ASK SATSUKI TO GIVE YOU SOME MONEY AND OTHER STUFF FOR YOUR TRIP TOO!
LEAVE IT TO MOMOSE!
HUH. WELL, NOT THAT MOMOSE REALLY CARES, BUT...
SU (PAT)
YOU JUST RELAX AND FOCUS ON UNDOING YOUR CURSE, NAO.

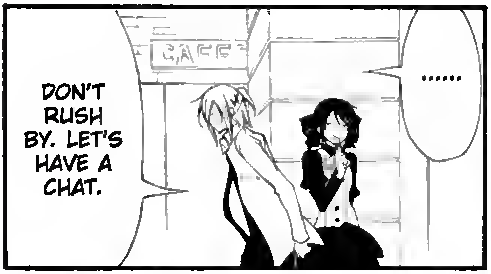

BYE-BYE.
WELL, HERE IT IS.
GOTO (CLUNK)
Please stand clear of the closing doors.
PIIII (WEEEE?)

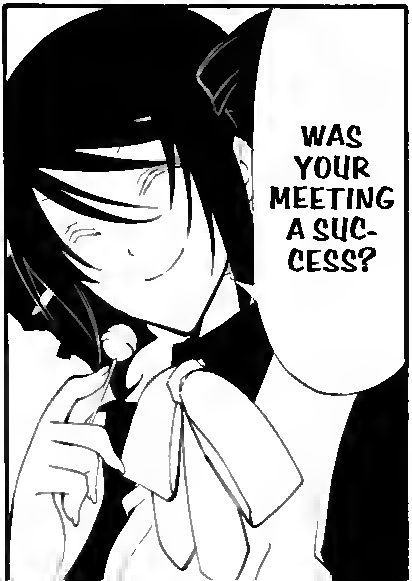




OH?

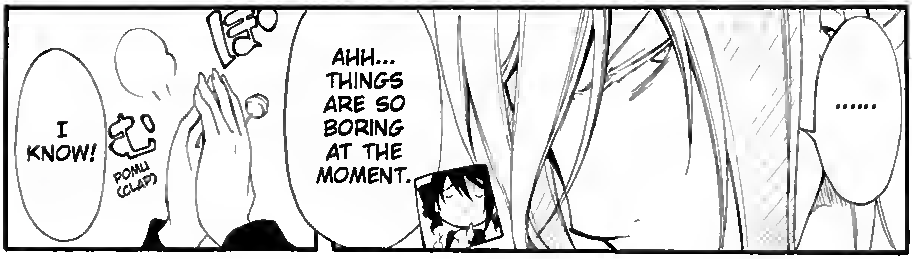
WEL-
COME
BACK.
...!


CAFE
DON'T RUSH BY. LET'S HAVE A CHAT.
.....


WAS YOUR MEETING A SUC-
CESS?

IF YOU DON'T HEAR ME OUT...

...I MIGHT HAVE TO TELL SOMEONE YOU'RE A TRAITOR, SIMPLY FOR KICKS.

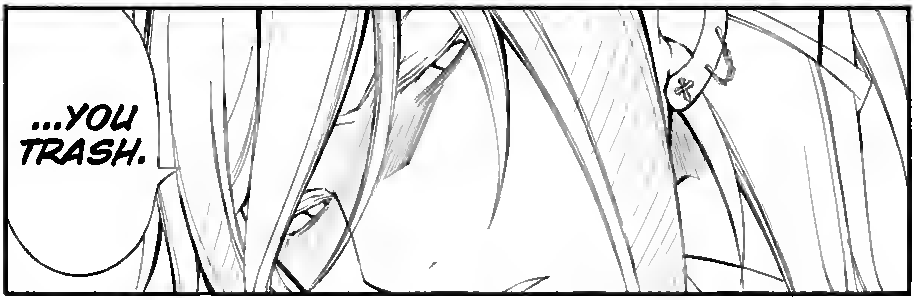

I KNOW!
PONN (CLAP)
AHH... THINGS ARE SO BORING AT THE MOMENT.
.....

I THINK I'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP MY MOUTH SHUT FOR THAT MUCH. ♥
HOW ABOUT YOU PAY ME, SAY, 100 MILLION WHEN THE CRUSADE IS OVER?

...WON'T YOU BE RECEIV-ING...
OH, BUT...
KOTSU (TOKK)
コッ

I DON'T HAVE THAT KIND OF MONEY.

...COMPEN-
SATION
FOR YOUR
SERVICES?

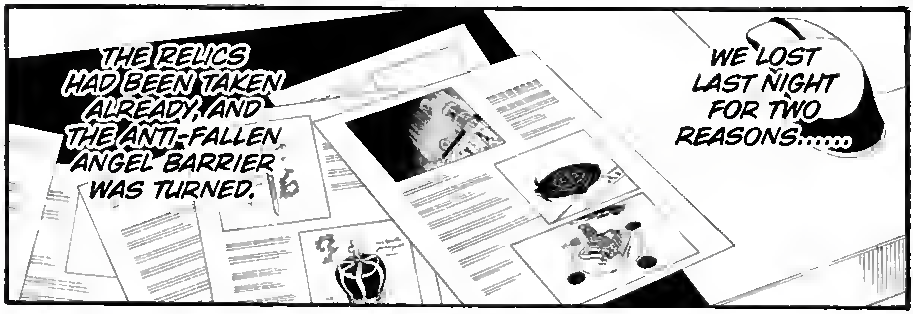

...YOU
TRASH.

GACHA
GYACHAN
SURELY
YOU
DON'T
WANT
THAT...

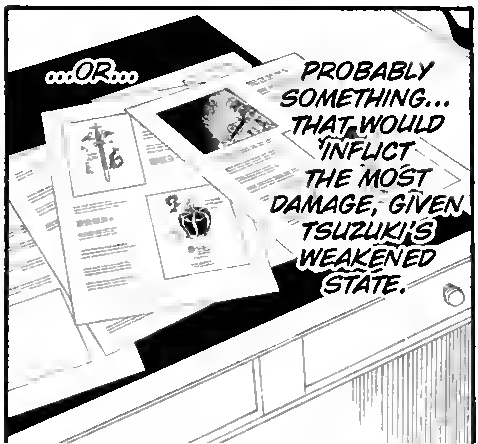
AH,
WELL...
HOW
COLD.

HEE.
YOU CAN'T
REALLY
AFFORD
TO DO
OTHERWISE,
THOUGH,
CAN YOU?
THEY'LL
PROBABLY
EXECUTE
YOU IF
YOU'RE
EXPOSED.

...
HAAH.
BASA (FLAP)


THE RELICS HAD BEEN TAKEN ALREADY, AND THE ANTI-FALLEN ANGEL BARRIER WAS TURNED.
WE LOST LAST NIGHT FOR TWO REASONS.....

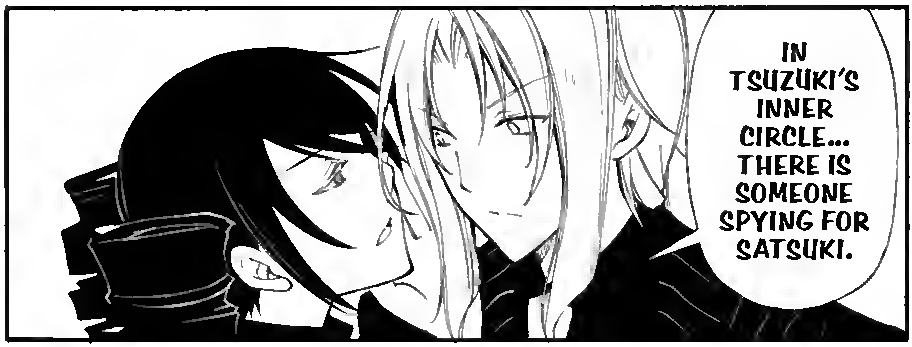
PROBABLY FROM THE BOOK OF DA'AT, CHOKHMAH, OR SOME NEW RELIC...
THE LIGHT THAT REVERSED THE BARRIER... I SUSPECT IT WAS ALSO FUELED BY DIVINE POWER.
DO (BOOM)


...OR...
PROBABLY SOMETHING... THAT WOULD INFLICT THE MOST DAMAGE, GIVEN TSUZUKI'S WEAKENED STATE.

NOW, IF I WERE THE ENEMY AND HAD THAT POWER, WHAT WOULD I DO, TONIGHT?

KON KONOCHO
...PERHAPS THEY MEAN TO KILL TSUZUKI...
KON
!
KII GUREAKO
I BEG YOUR PARDON .....
...COME IN.
GACHA OKACHAKO
SORRY TO BOTHER YOU AT THIS BUSY TIME.
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME-THING TO DRINK?
...I WANTED TO GET YOUR OPINION ON OUR PLAN FOR TONIGHT.
KANADE... NOT AT ALL. ACTUAL-LY...
NO, THANKS.
MORE URGENTLY ...

...
THERE'S
...
...SOME-
THING I'D
LIKE TO
REPORT
TO YOU IN
SECRET.


IN
TSUZUKI'S
INNER
CIRCLE...
THERE IS
SOMEONE
SPYING FOR
SATSUKI.

THE
UNANTIC-
IPATED
BARRIER
MESS LAST
NIGHT?
THAT...
WAS
NAO'S
DOING.

WHAT
.....?

EVEN NOW, HE'S JUST RETURNED FROM SOME SORT OF MEETING WITH SATSUKI'S MINIONS.
I'D BE CARE-FUL.
IF THAT'S TRUE...IT'S CERTAINLY A BOTHER.
A WAY TO KEEP THE CRUSADES GOING AND BECOME GOD EVEN AFTER HE'S KILLED TSUZUKI... WASN'T IT?
YES... WHAT WAS IT SATSUKI SAID DURING THAT LAST CALL...?
MY GUESS IS HE'LL MAKE GOOD ON THAT THREAT...
...DURING TONIGHT'S CRUSADE AND WITH NAO'S ASSIS-TANCE.
MM...BUT IT'S QUITE INTRIGUING, THIS PLAN OF HIS. I WISH WE COULD FIND OUT MORE.
HIS GUARD IS TIGHT.
IT WON'T BE EASY TO GET THAT INFOR-MATION.
.....OH!
THEN... ALLOWING TSUZUKI TO TAKE A CRITICAL HIT TONIGHT...
NIKO GRIND
...MIGHT BE THE PERFECT WAY TO UNVEIL SATSUKI'S SCHEME TO BECOME GOD. NO?

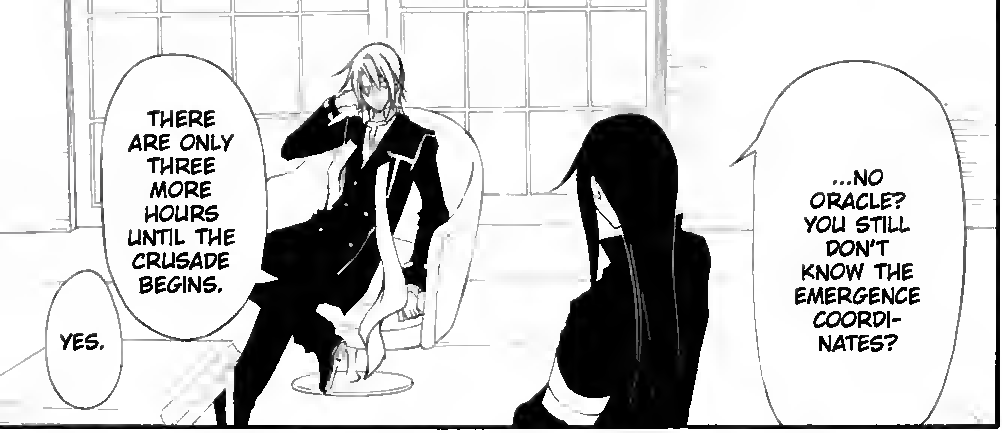
AFTER ALL...

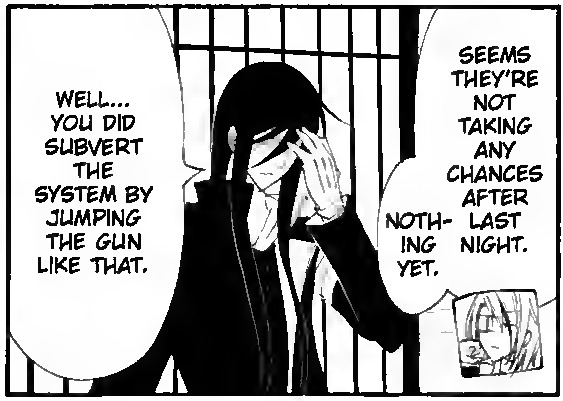
AREN'T YOU PLANNING TO BUMP OFF TSUZUKI AT SOME POINT ANYWAY?
AWW...
.....

...THE GOD CANDIDATE WOULD BE IN THE WAY... OF YOU BECOMING GOD, RIGHT? ♪

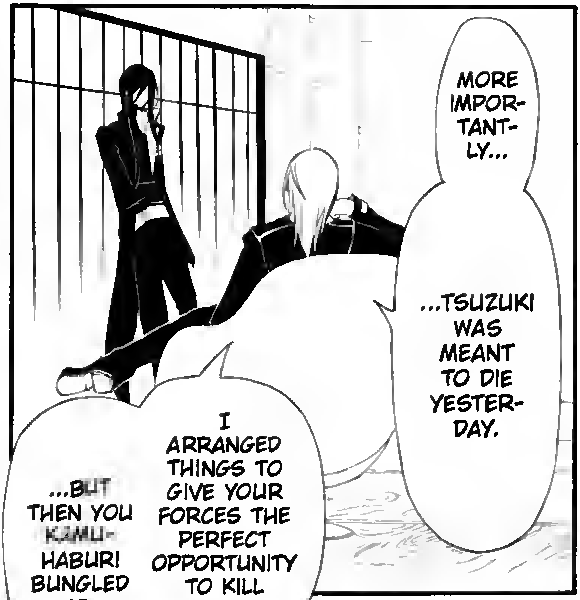
IT LOOKS LIKE MOMOSE'S FINISHED TOO.
AND YOU?
WE ARE READY TO DEPART.
..... BUT...

PUTSU (CLICK)


...NO ORACLE? YOU STILL DON'T KNOW THE EMERGENCE COORDINATES?
THERE ARE ONLY THREE MORE HOURS UNTIL THE CRUSADE BEGINS.
YES.

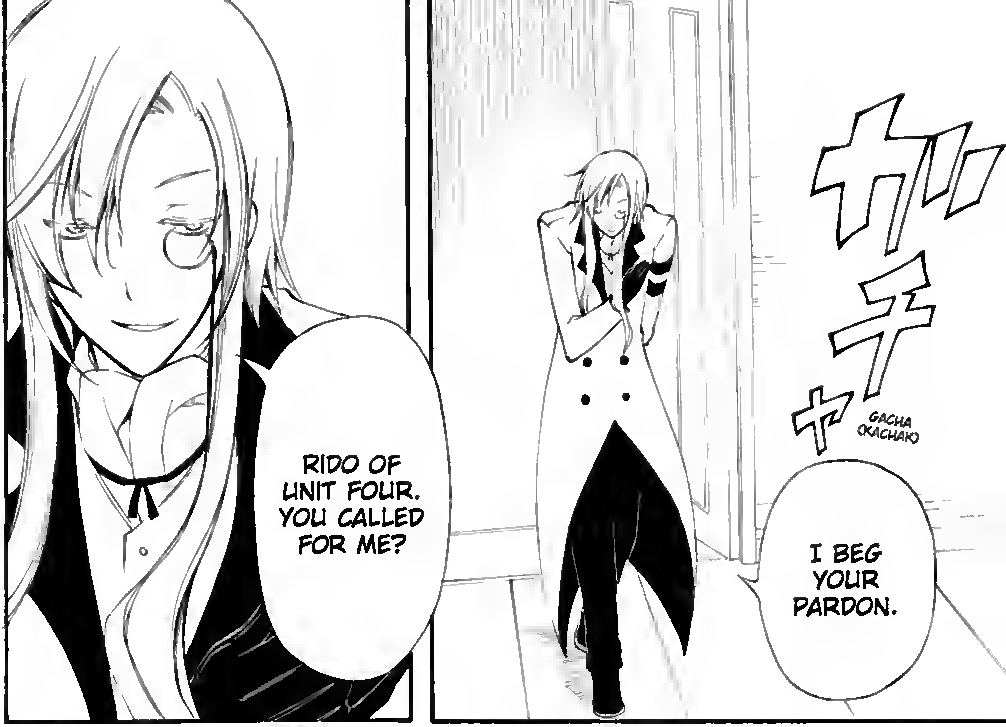

SEEMS THEY'RE NOT TAKING ANY CHANCES AFTER LAST NIGHT.
NOTHING YET.
WELL... YOU DID SUBVERT THE SYSTEM BY JUMPING THE GUN LIKE THAT.

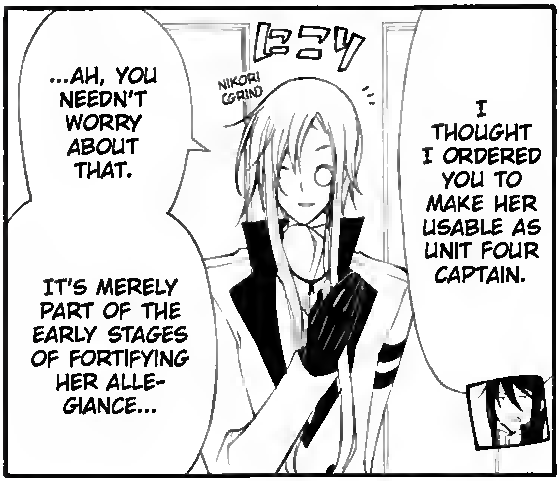
HMPH... I'M SURE I'LL RECEIVE WORD BY MIDNIGHT.

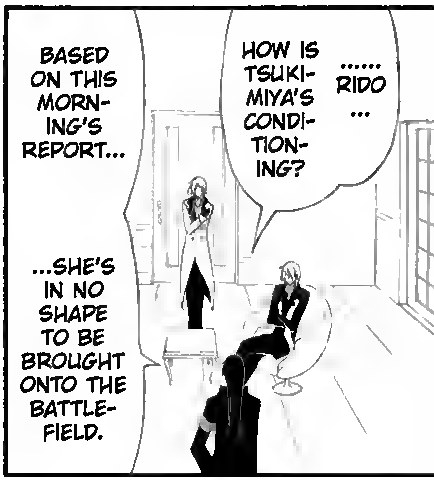

MORE IMPORTANTLY...
...TSUZUKI WAS MEANT TO DIE YESTERDAY.
I ARRANGED THINGS TO GIVE YOUR FORCES THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY TO KILL HIM...
...BUT THEN YOU KAMUHABURI BUNGLED IT.

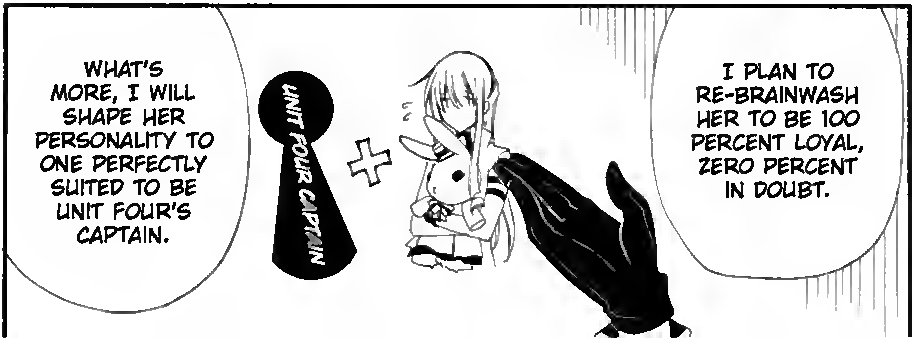
TONIGHT HAD BETTER NOT BE A REPEAT PERFORMANCE...
YOU ARE SURE THE PLAN WILL GO SMOOTHLY?

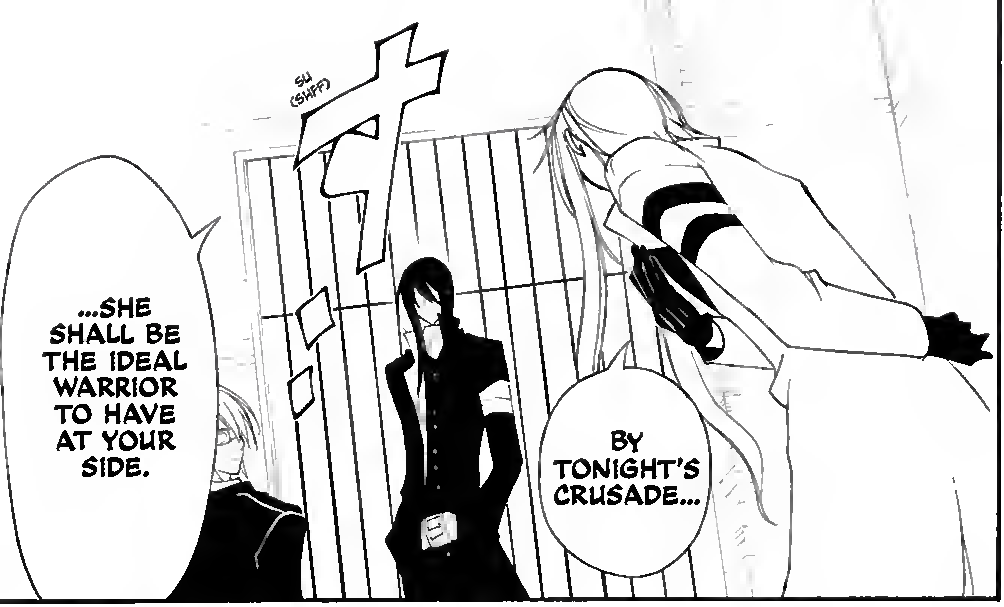
KON
KNOCK
KON
.....

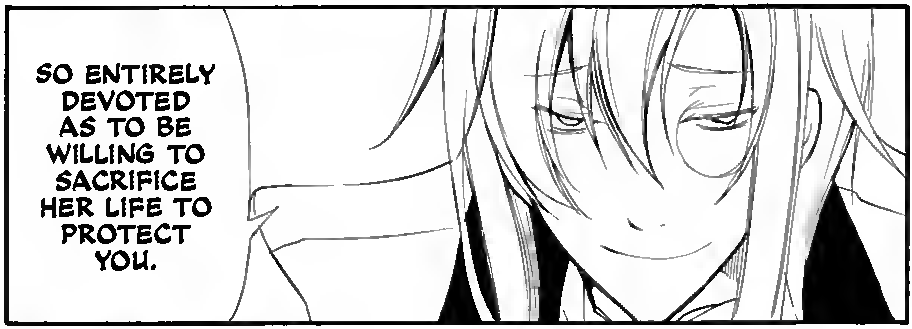

RIDO OF UNIT FOUR. YOU CALLED FOR ME?
I BEG YOUR PARDON.
GACHA GACHAKO


I THOUGHT I ORDERED YOU TO MAKE HER USABLE AS UNIT FOUR CAPTAIN.
NIKORI GRIND
...AH, YOU NEEDN'T WORRY ABOUT THAT.
IT'S MERELY PART OF THE EARLY STAGES OF FORTIFYING HER ALLEGIANCE...

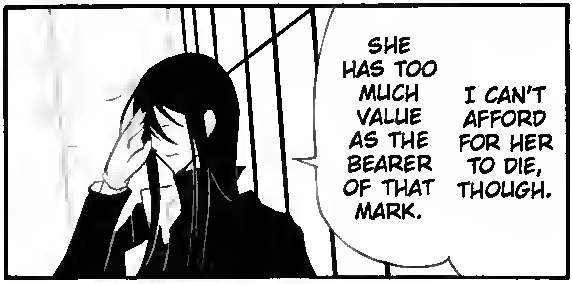

..... RIDO ...
HOW IS TSUKIMIYA'S CONDITIONING?
BASED ON THIS MORNING'S REPORT...
...SHE'S IN NO SHAPE TO BE BROUGHT ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD.

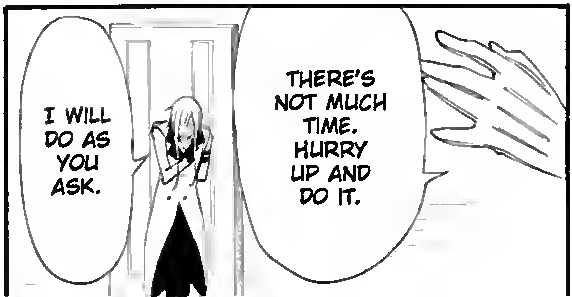

WHAT'S MORE, I WILL SHAPE HER PERSONALITY TO ONE PERFECTLY SUITED TO BE UNIT FOUR'S CAPTAIN.
UNIT FOUR CAPTAIN
I PLAN TO RE-BRAINWASH HER TO BE 100 PERCENT LOYAL, ZERO PERCENT IN DOUBT.


SU (SHA?)
...SHE SHALL BE THE IDEAL WARRIOR TO HAVE AT YOUR SIDE.
BY TONIGHT'S CRUSADE...

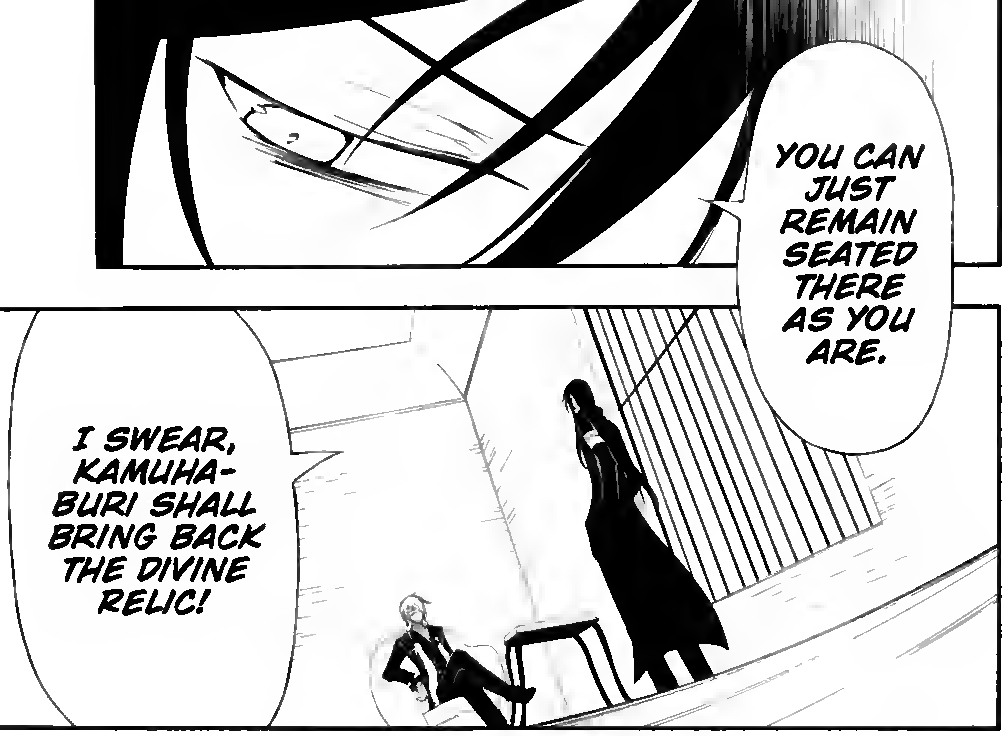

SO ENTIRELY DEVOTED AS TO BE WILLING TO SACRIFICE HER LIFE TO PROTECT YOU.

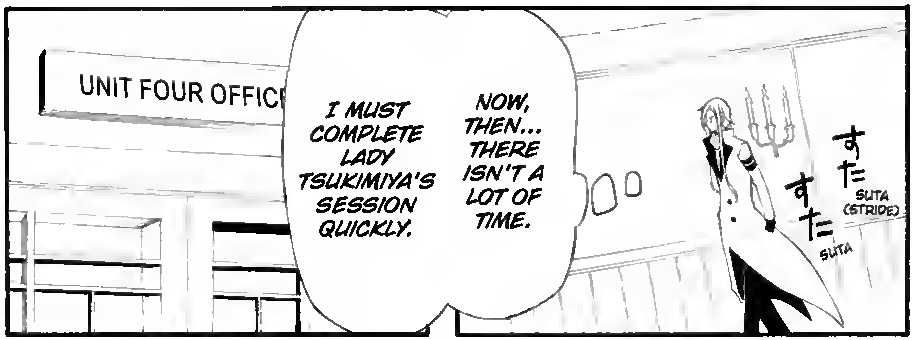
SATSUKI .....
...TO MAKE UP FOR KAMUHA-BURI'S SHAMEFUL PERFOR-MANCE...


SHE HAS TOO MUCH VALUE AS THE BEARER OF THAT MARK.
I CAN'T AFFORD FOR HER TO DIE, THOUGH.


I WILL DO AS YOU ASK.
THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME. HURRY UP AND DO IT.

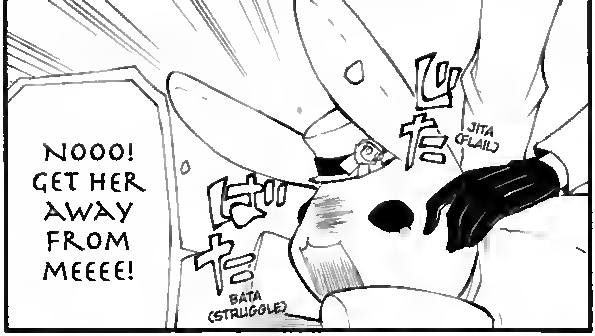
84 (FWP)
...I WILL LEAD THE FRONT LINES TONIGHT.
DON'T LET ME HEAR YOU WHINING ABOUT IT AS YOU LAY DYING.
YOU NEED NOT EXERT YOURSELF, LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
YOU WILL NOT BE CALLED ON TO SULLY YOUR HANDS.
YOU SEEM UNCHARACTERISTICALLY FAINT-HEARTED TONIGHT, MY DEAR SIR.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WITH WHOM YOU ARE ALLIED?


YOU CAN JUST REMAIN SEATED THERE AS YOU ARE.
I SWEAR, KAMUHA-BURI SHALL BRING BACK THE DIVINE RELIC!

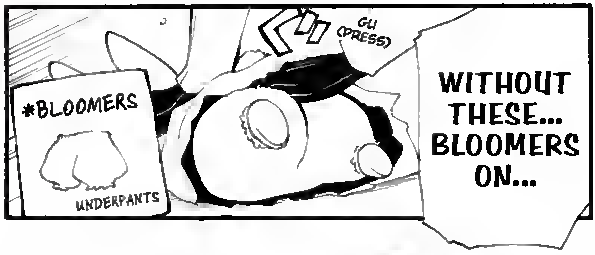

UNIT FOUR OFFIC
NOW, THEN... THERE ISN'T A LOT OF TIME.
I MUST COMPLETE LADY TSUKIMIYA'S SESSION QUICKLY.
すたSUTA (STRIDE)
すたSUTA

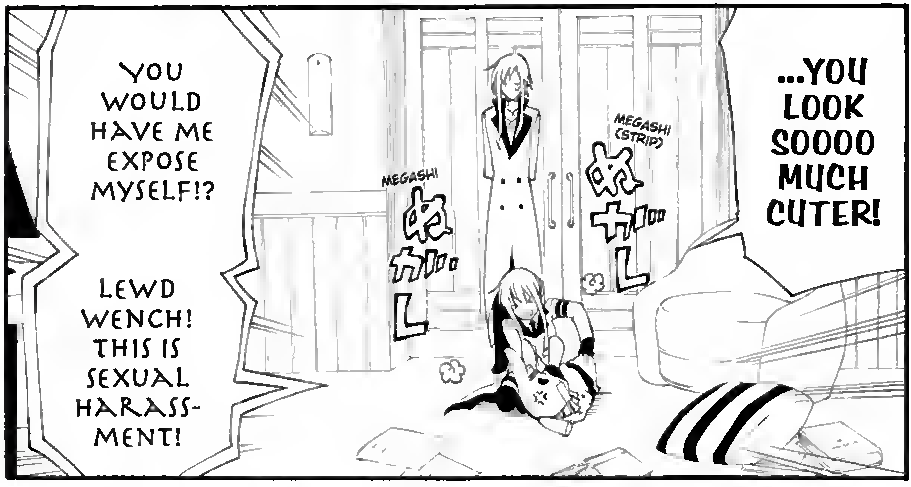
GOO (WHOOM)
AIEEEEEE!!!

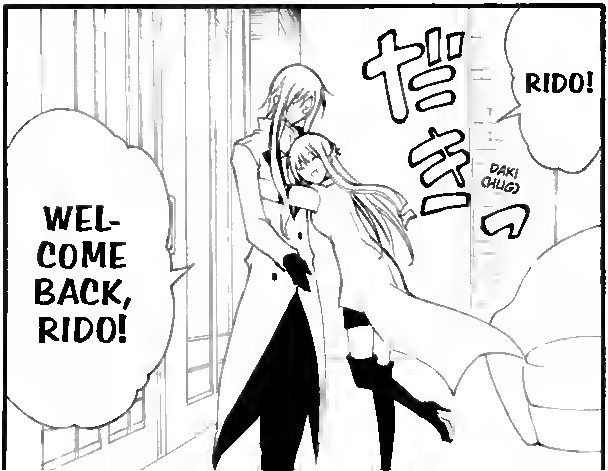
ガチャ
GACHA (KACHAK)

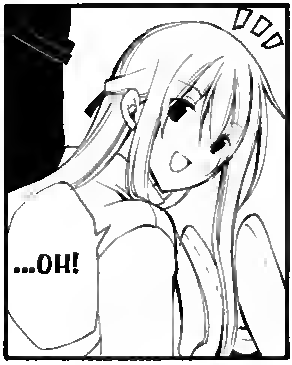

NOOO! GET HER AWAY FROM MEEEE!
JITA (FLAIL)
BATA (STRUGGLE)

NO, NO!
DON'T MOVE, MARI-ANNE!

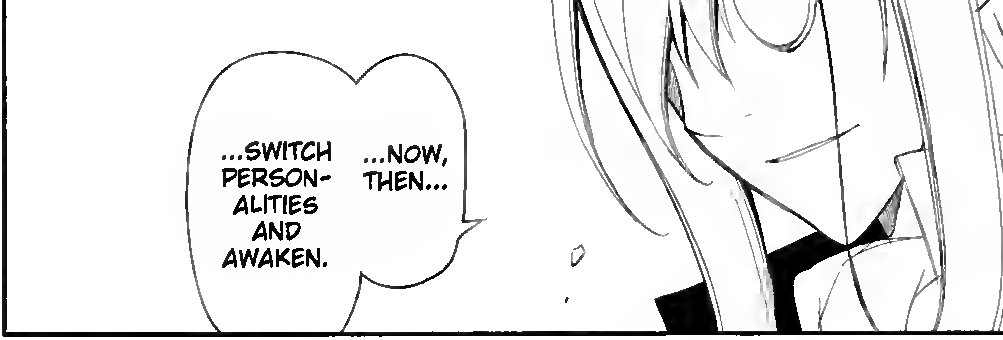

*BLOOMERS
UNDERPANTS
GU (PRESS)
WITHOUT THESE... BLOOMERS ON...

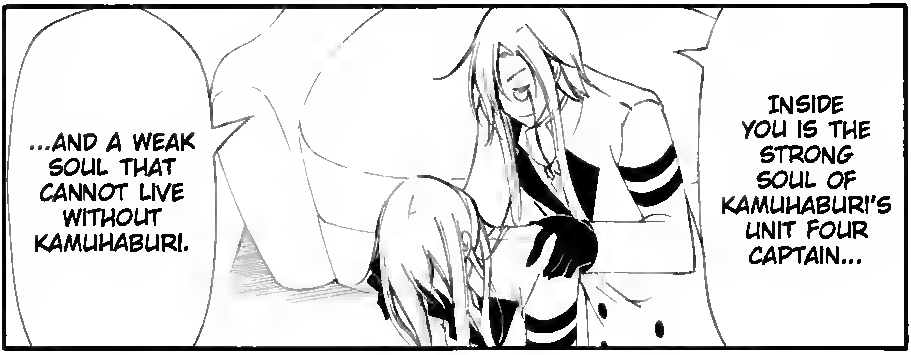

YOU WOULD HAVE ME EXPOSE MYSELF!?
LEWD WENCH! THIS IS SEXUAL HARASS-MENT!
MEGASHI
MEGASHI (STRIP)
...YOU LOOK SOOOO MUCH CUTER!

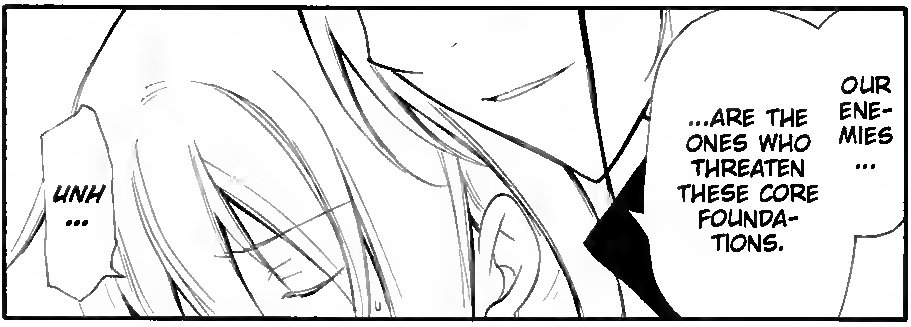

RIDO!
DAKI (HUG)
WEL-COME BACK, RIDO!

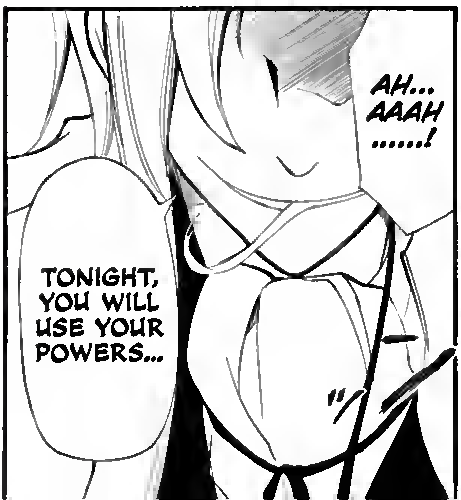

...OH!

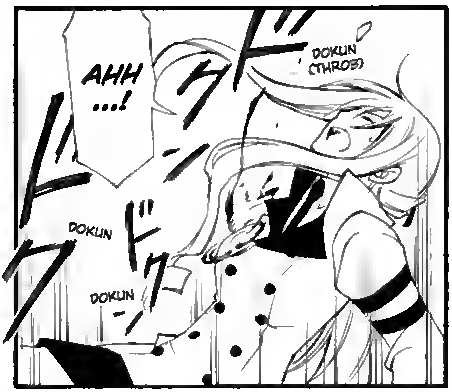
I'M GLAD TO BE BACK, LADY TSUKIMIYA.
HAVE YOU BEEN A GOOD GIRL?
YES, OF COURSE!
WELL, THEN, I HAVE A LITTLE REWARD FOR YOU FOR BEING SUCH A GOOD GIRL.
SU (SHFF)
I TOLD YOU, SHE WASN'T GOOD!
LIES! SHE'S BEEN A TERROR, HURLING ME ABOUT AND STRIPPING ME DOWN!
GRRRR!
YOU!
NUH-UH! I HAVEN'T STRIPPED YOUR CLOTHES OFF...YET!
110
PACHIN (SNAP)
!
DOSA (THUD)

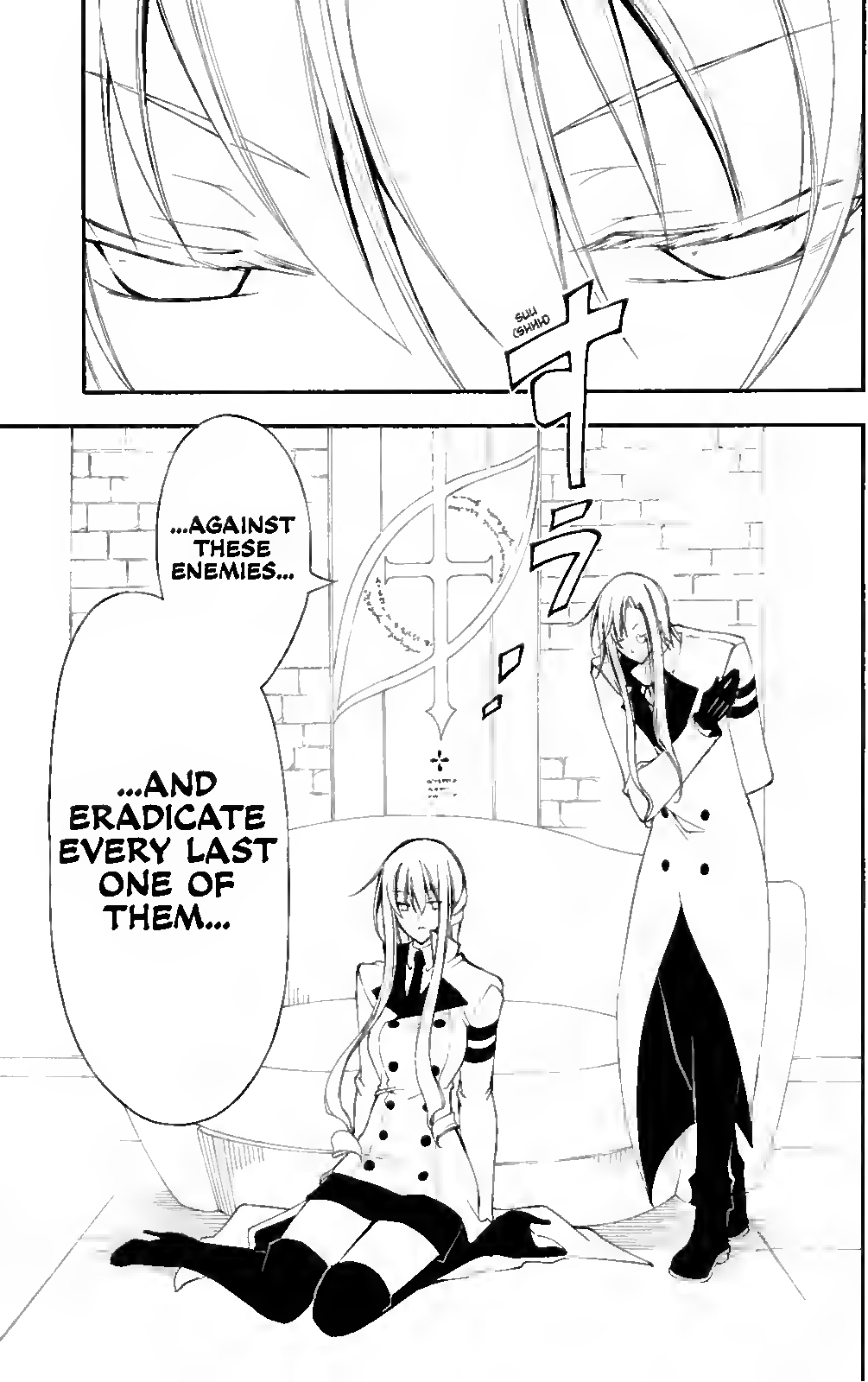

...NOW, THEN...
...SWITCH PERSON-ALITIES AND AWAKEN.


INSIDE YOU IS THE STRONG SOUL OF KAMUHABURI'S UNIT FOUR CAPTAIN...
...AND A WEAK SOUL THAT CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT KAMUHABURI.

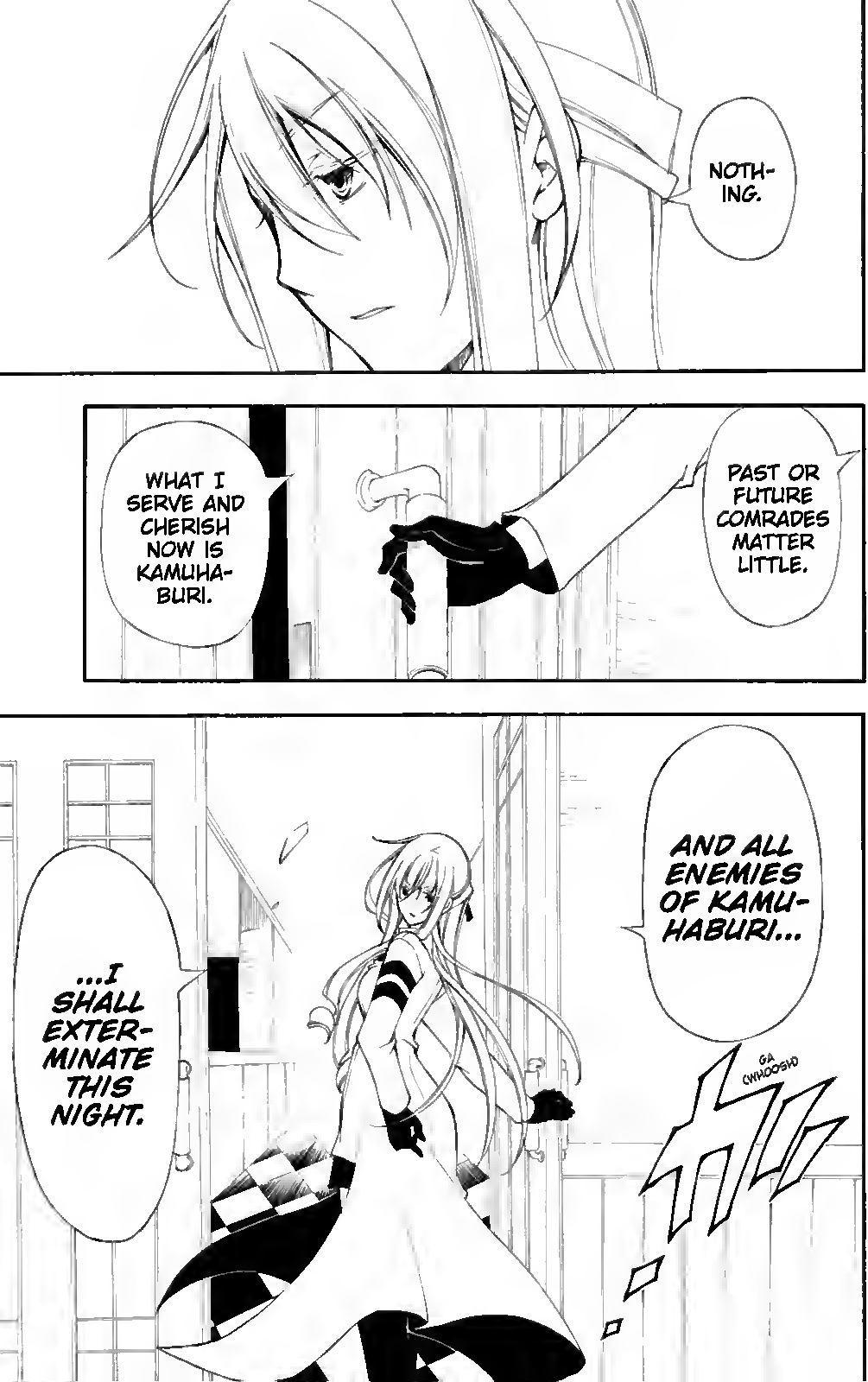

OUR ENE-MIES ...
...ARE THE ONES WHO THREATEN THESE CORE FOUNDA-TIONS.
UNH ...


AH... AAAH .....!
TONIGHT, YOU WILL USE YOUR POWERS...


AHH ...!
DOKUN (THROB)
DOKUN
DOKUN

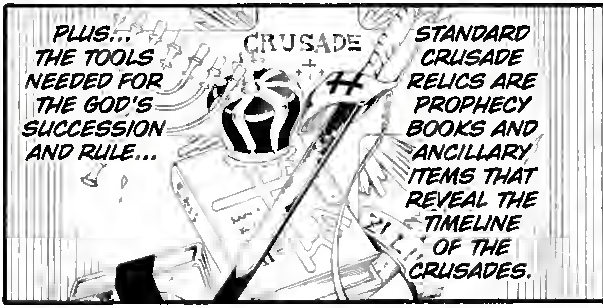

SUU GHIMO
チラ
...AGAINST THESE ENEMIES...
...AND ERADICATE EVERY LAST ONE OF THEM...

KATSU CHAO
THE CRUSADE IS IMMINENT... GET READY. NOW.
KATSU
.....
...WHAT IS THE TIME?
I SEE.
IT'S JUST PAST NINE RIGHT NOW.
...I HEAR SOME OF YOUR FORMER COMRADES WILL BE AMONG THE OPPOSING FORCES TONIGHT.
KATSU
...BY THE WAY ...
YES, LADY TSUKI-MIYA.
KATSUN
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY TO THAT?

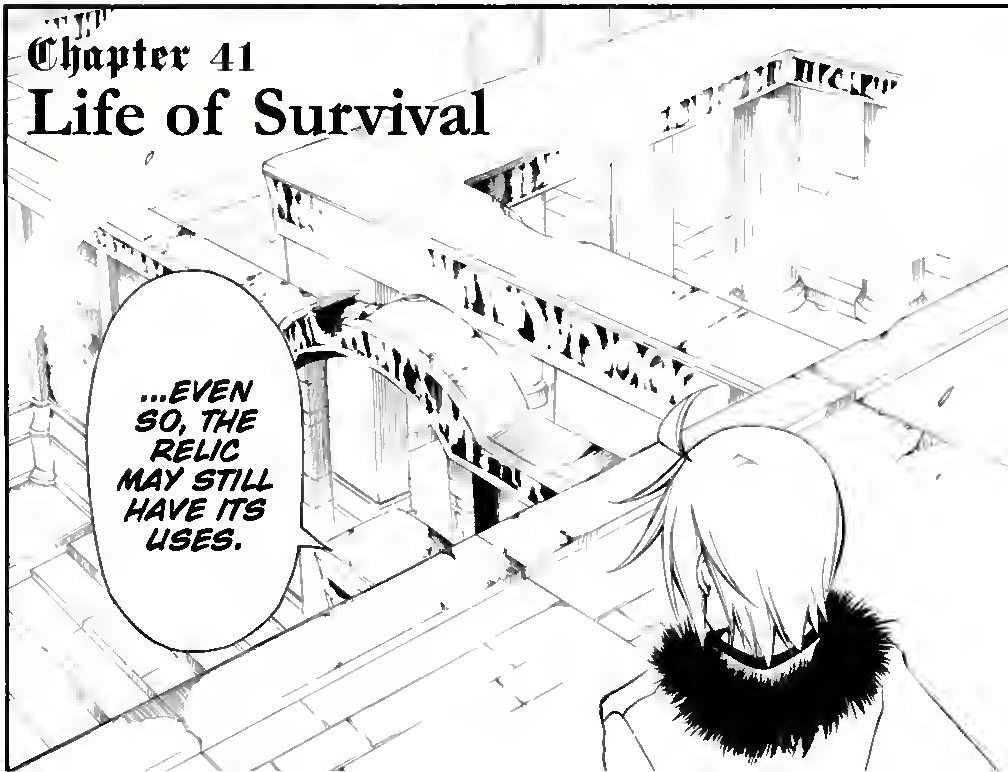

NOTH-
ING.
PAST OR FUTURE COMRADES MATTER LITTLE.
WHAT I SERVE AND CHERISH NOW IS KAMUHA-BURI.
AND ALL ENEMIES OF KAMU-HABURI...
...I SHALL EXTER-MINATE THIS NIGHT.
GA CHHOOSHO

BLOODY CROSS

...THIS IS PROBABLY THE FIRST-EVER ANOMALOUS CRUSADE THAT DISREGARDS THE PROPHECY BOOKS.
KATSU (TAK)
NOW...
I WONDER WHAT SORT OF RELIC WILL APPEAR...
...O GOD.
KOO (SHWOO)
SHOW ME.
TELL ME WHAT TONIGHT'S CRUSADE HOLDS.
ZAA (FINISH)

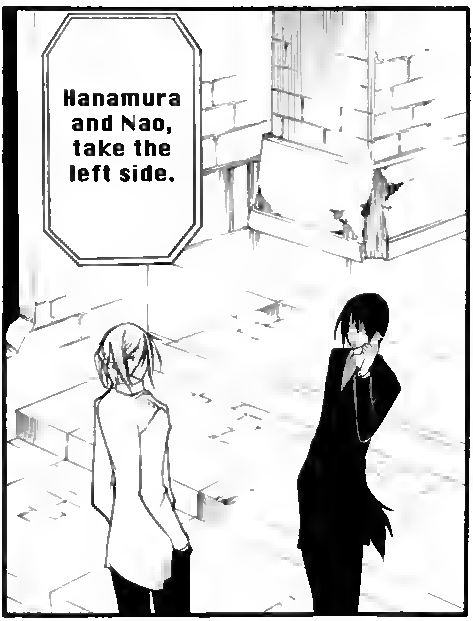

PLUS... THE TOOLS NEEDED FOR THE GOD'S SUCCESSION AND RULE...
CRUSADE
STANDARD CRUSADE RELICS ARE PROPHECY BOOKS AND ANCILLARY ITEMS THAT REVEAL THE TIMELINE OF THE CRUSADES.

Chapter 41
Life of Survival

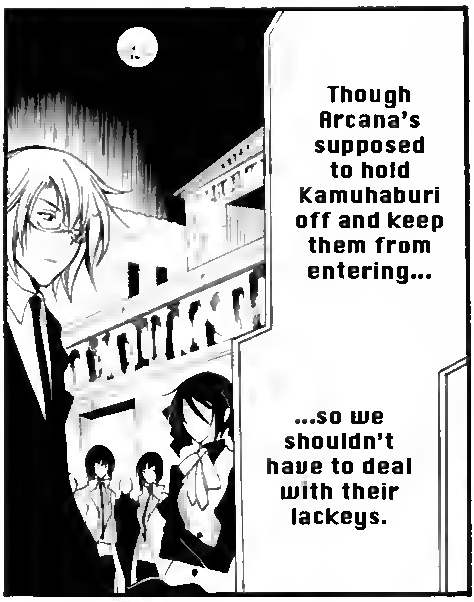


HEY, CAN EVERY-ONE HEAR ME?
ONLY TEN MINUTES TO MID-NIGHT.
AS WE DISCUSSED, WE'LL SEARCH THIS ANCIENT TEMPLE COMPLEX IN THREE GROUPS.

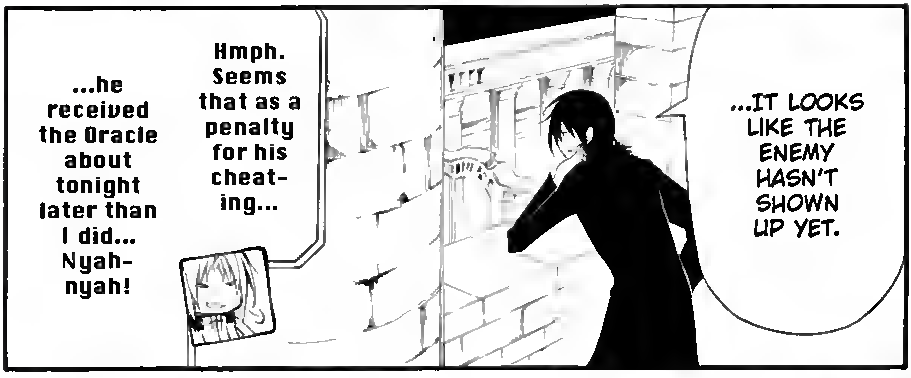
Hinata, the right.


Hanamura and Nao, take the left side.

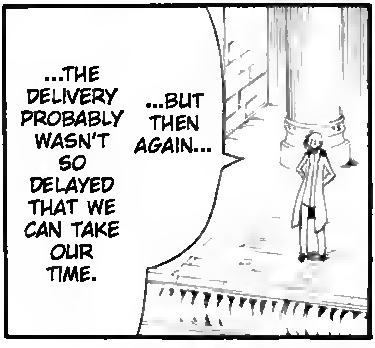
AND I'LL FOCUS MOSTLY ON THE CENTRAL SECTION.


Though Arcana's supposed to hold Kamuhaburi off and keep them from entering...
...so we shouldn't have to deal with their lackeys.

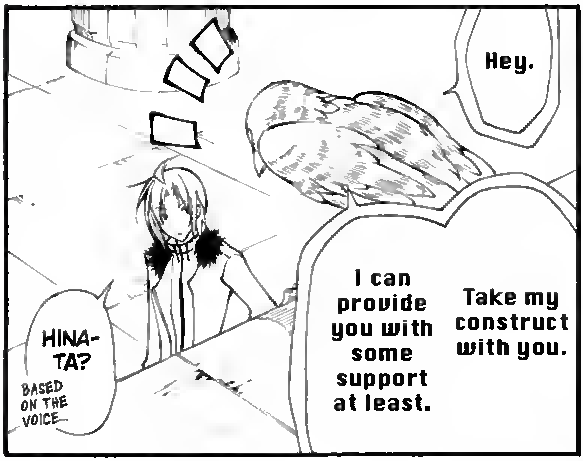
TSUZUKI WILL TAKE THE LEAD IN THE SEARCH SINCE HE CAN SENSE RELICS.
THE REST OF US ARE TO PRIORITIZE DEALING WITH THE ENEMY.
Aight.


...IT LOOKS LIKE THE ENEMY HASN'T SHOWN UP YET.
Hmph. Seems that as a penalty for his cheating...
...he received the Oracle about tonight later than I did... Nyah-nyah!

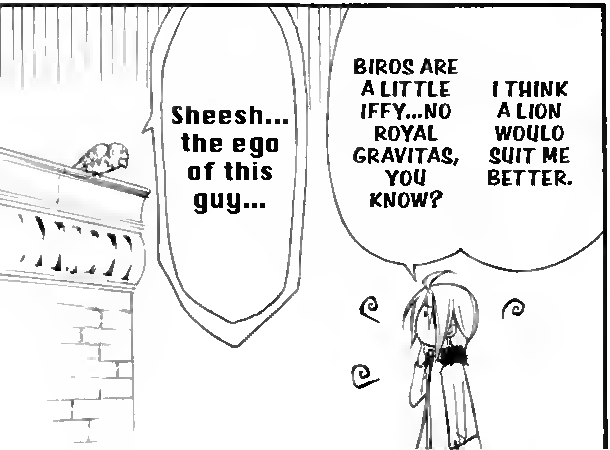
YOU MAY BE TIRED FROM LAST NIGHT, BUT SO ARE THEY.
USE YOUR WITS AND WILL TO PULL THROUGH.
CHAKI (KSHING)


...BUT THEN AGAIN...
...THE DELIVERY PROBABLY WASN'T SO DELAYED THAT WE CAN TAKE OUR TIME.

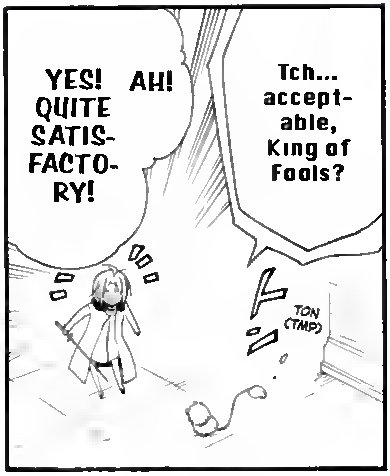
LET'S GRAB THE RELIC...
...BEFORE THE ENEMY EVEN ARRIVES.


Hey.
Take my construct with you.
I can provide you with some support at least.
HINA-TA?
BASED ON THE VOICE—

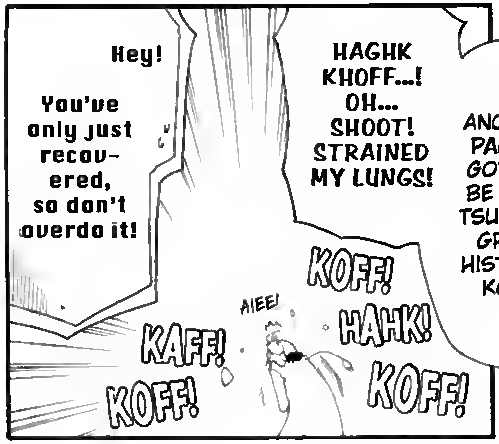
BASA (FLAP)
BASA
HMM?


Sheesh... the ego of this guy...
BIRDS ARE A LITTLE IFFY...NO ROYAL GRAVITAS, YOU KNOW?
I THINK A LION WOULD SUIT ME BETTER.

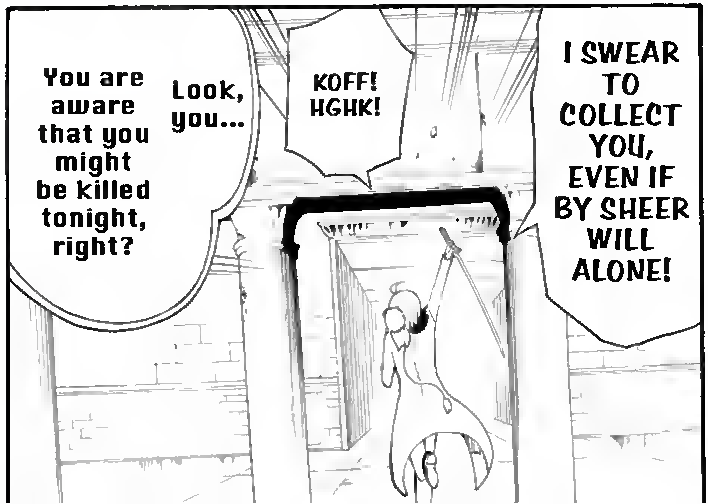
.....
THANKS, BUT...
...NO THANKS.
ZUKYAN (SHUDDER)


YES! AH! QUITE SATIS-FACTO-RY!
Tch... accept-able, King of Fools?
TON (TMP)

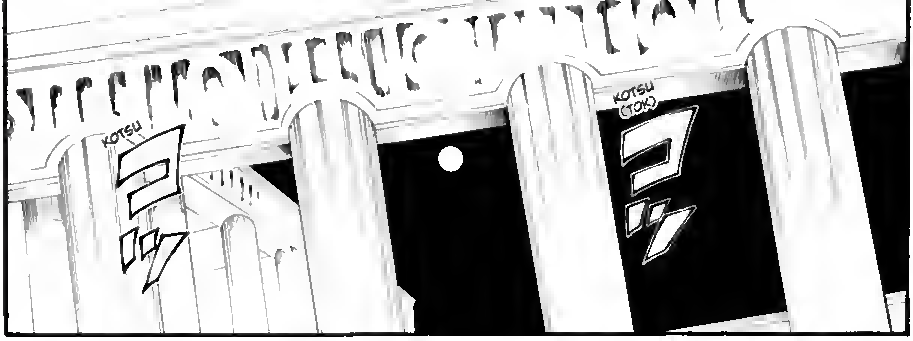
BON (BWOOF)
Fine!


Hey!
You've only just recov-ered, so don't overdo it!
HAGHK KHOFF...! OH... SHOOT! STRAINED MY LUNGS!
KOFF!
AIEE!
KAFF!
HAHK!
KOFF!
KOFF!

ANOTHER PAGE IN GOD-TO-BE LORD TSUZUKI'S GRAND HISTOR— KOFF!
HUP!
HO... HO-HO. SHALL WE BEGIN?


You are aware that you might be killed tonight, right?
Look, you...
KOFF! HGHK!
I SWEAR TO COLLECT YOU, EVEN IF BY SHEER WILL ALONE!

GAH... DAMMIT... YOU WAIT, RELIC.

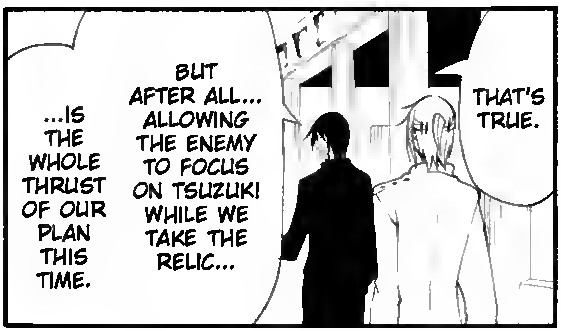

KOTSU
KOTSU
KOTSU

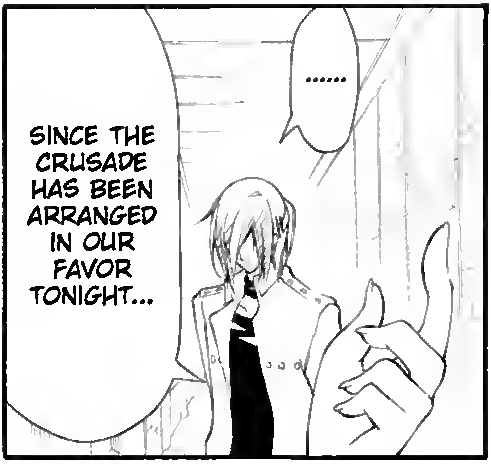
YES...

KOTSU
.....
WILL SIR PUREBLOOD BE OKAY BY HIMSELF?

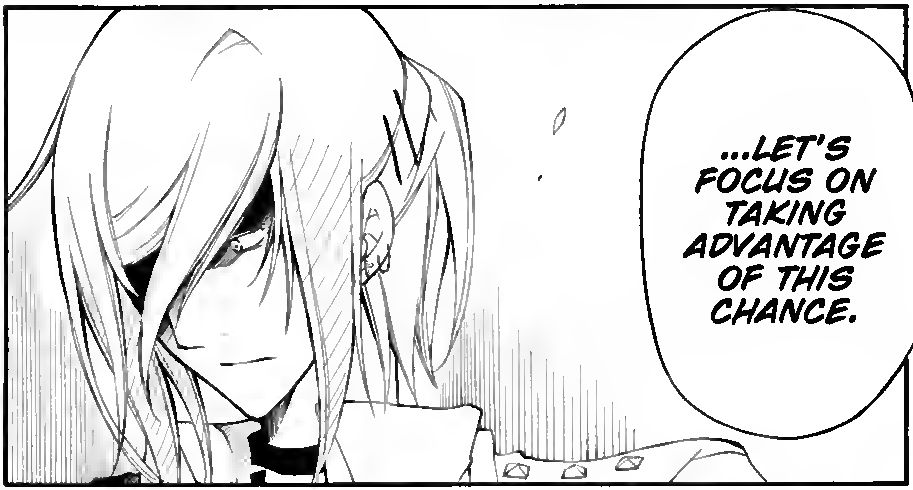
...SATSUKI SAID HE'D FOUND A WAY TO KILL HIM WITHOUT SUSPENDING THE CRUSADE, RIGHT?
?

THOUGH SOME UNCERTAINTY EXISTS, THERE'S A STRONG CHANCE HE'LL MANAGE ON HIS OWN.
TSUZUKI IS A GOD CANDIDATE.


...IS THE WHOLE THRUST OF OUR PLAN THIS TIME.
BUT AFTER ALL... ALLOWING THE ENEMY TO FOCUS ON TSUZUKI WHILE WE TAKE THE RELIC...
THAT'S TRUE.


SINCE THE CRUSADE HAS BEEN ARRANGED IN OUR FAVOR TONIGHT...
.....

...SO I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO WORRY TOO MUCH.
...WHICH MEANS BOTH WE AND HINATA CAN QUICKLY RUSH TO HIS AID...
EVEN IF THE SITUATION TURNS BAD, HE'S POSITIONED IN THE CENTRAL AREA...
TSUKI
HANA
NAO
ENTRANCE


...LET'S FOCUS ON TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS CHANCE.

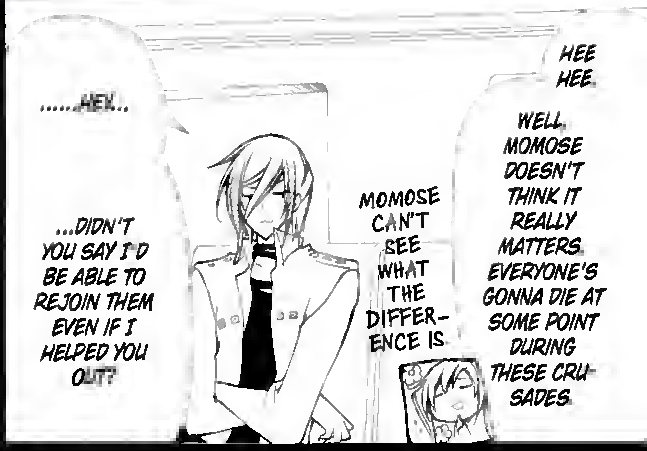
...YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT.
IT REALLY IS...JUST LIKE YOU SAID.
?
...NAO?

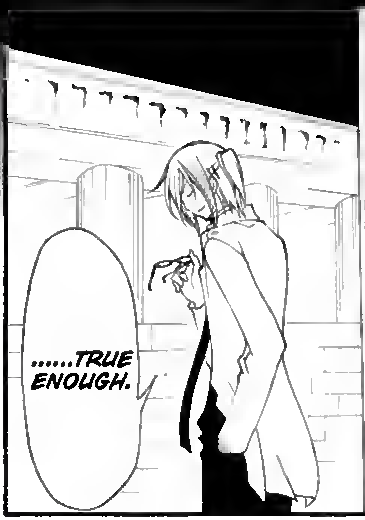
HUH ...?
PUTSU (SHKK)
.....GOTTA TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS CHANCE.
DOSA (THUD)
GAKU (SLUMP)

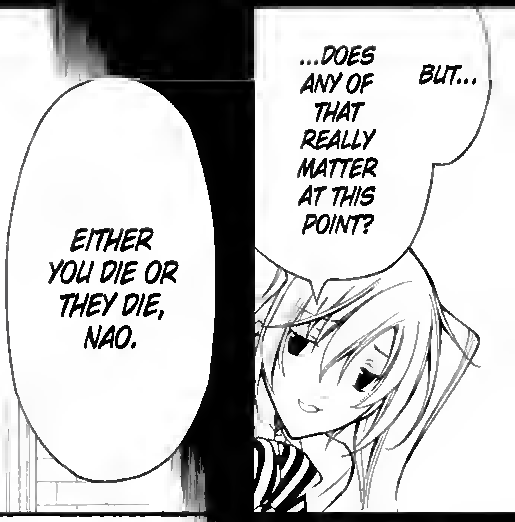
A VALID POINT.
TONIGHT...
...WE'LL BE TRYING SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT.
SO, NAO, WE WANT YOU...
...TO KILL TWO OF TSUZUKI'S INNER CIRCLE. ♥
.....
LOOK- SEE THIS?

THIS...
...IS A SPECIAL POISON-COATED NEEDLE.
.....
EASY, RIGHT?
IT'S ONLY FOR THE DOG AND HINATA.
HUH? ...MM... NOT SURE.
...WHY ATTACK IN SUCH A ROUND-ABOUT WAY?
INSTANT DEATH. SEE? THAT'S THE CURSE ON THIS SYRINGE.
ONE JAB AND YOUR TARGET WILL DROP DEAD ON THE SPOT.
...SO HE'S TRYING...A LESS DIRECT APPROACH TONIGHT.
SATSUKI SAID IT WOULD BE TOO EASY AND TOO BORING TO KILL HIM OUTRIGHT...
THAT'S RIGHT!
HMM...
OH YEAH...

YOU COULD MAYBE REJOIN ARCANA.
IF YOU TRY REAL HARD.
OH!
HUH? WHAT? DID WE? WHO CARES?
.....


.....HEY..
...DIDN'T YOU SAY I'D BE ABLE TO REJOIN THEM EVEN IF I HELPED YOU OUT?
MOMOSE CAN'T SEE WHAT THE DIFFERENCE IS
HEE HEE.
WELL, MOMOSE DOESN'T THINK IT REALLY MATTERS. EVERYONE'S GONNA DIE AT SOME POINT DURING THESE CRUSADES.

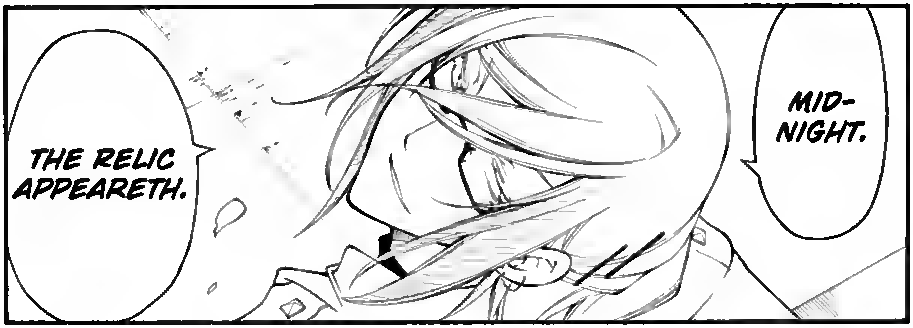

.....TRUE ENOUGH.

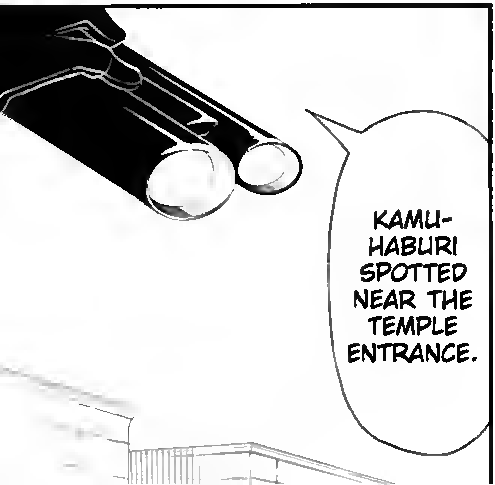

EITHER YOU DIE OR THEY DIE, NAO.
...DOES ANY OF THAT REALLY MATTER AT THIS POINT?
BUT...

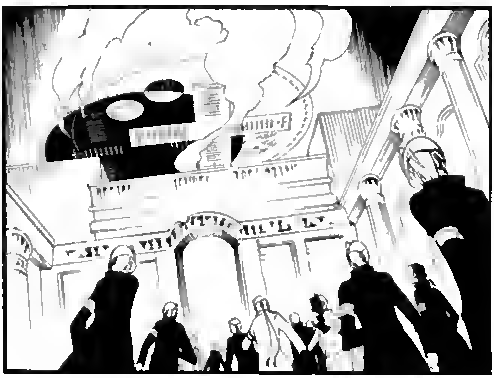
...OR THEY'LL LIVE.

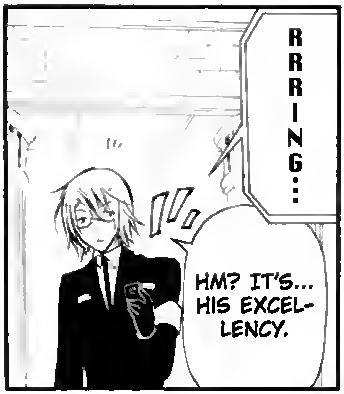
EITHER I'LL LIVE...

KOO
(SHWOO)

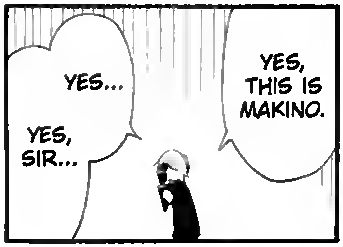

MID-
NIGHT.
THE RELIC
APPEARETH.

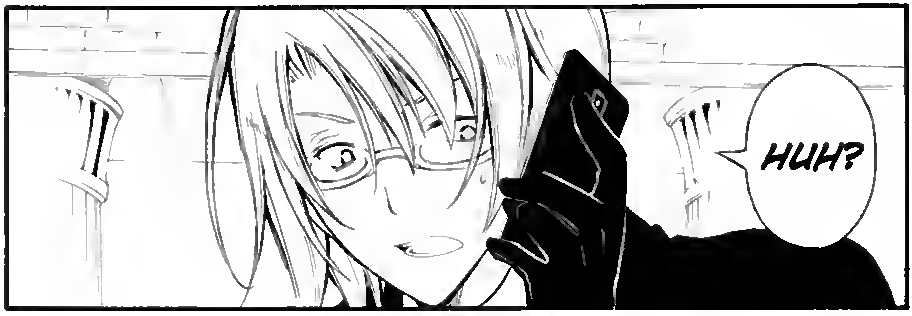

KAMU-
HABURI
SPOTTED
NEAR THE
TEMPLE
ENTRANCE.



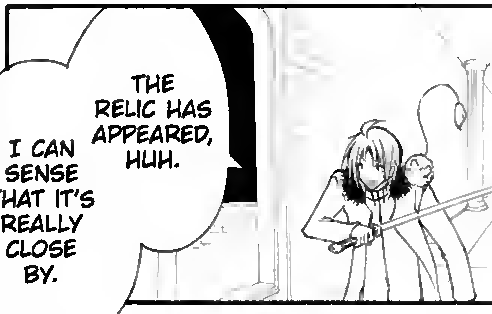

RRRING...
HM? IT'S... HIS EXCEL-LENCY.

WELL?
SHALL WE HEAD DOWN THERE?


YES, THIS IS MAKINO.
YES...
YES, SIR...


HUH?

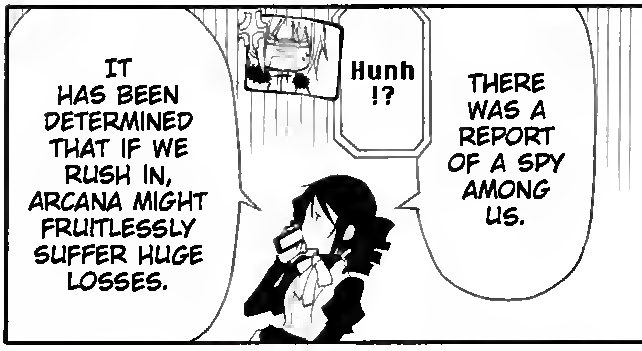
HM?
BATA
BATA (STOMP)


THE RELIC HAS APPEARED, HUH.
I CAN SENSE THAT IT'S REALLY CLOSE BY.

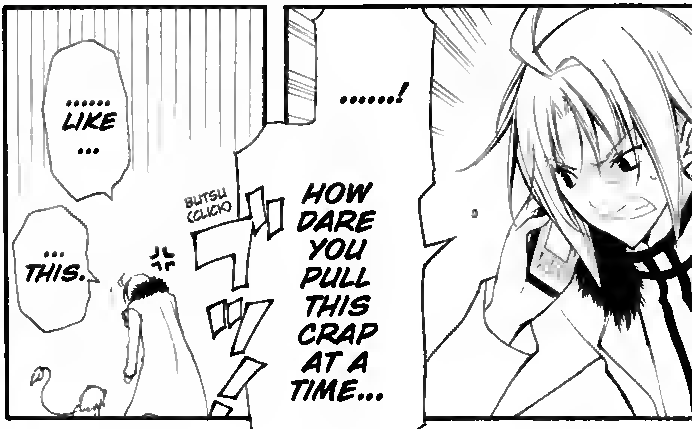
.....NOW, GO FIND THE RELIC.
Hey, hey... I thought Arcana was supposed to stop Kamu-haburi!
WHA ...!?
WHAT THE HECK IS ARCANA DOING!!?
BATA
BATA
IT APPEARS THOSE COWARDLY ARCANA TROOPS DON'T INTEND TO ENGAGE US.
SAVES US THE TROUBLE.
WE WERE READY AND POISED TO MOVE IN. BUT...
KIIIN (STING)
I.....I'M VERY SORRY!
GAA (SNARL)
HEY, MAKINO! WHY ISN'T ARCANA TAKING OOWN THESE GUYS!?
QUIT FOOLING AROUND AND STOP THEM!!
PASHI (SNATCH)
...SUD-DENLY...

I'M AFRAID WE WON'T LIFT A FINGER UNTIL WE KNOW FOR CERTAIN THERE'S NO MOLE...OR THE SPY REVEALS HIM- OR HERSELF.
FRIGHT-FULLY SORRY.

MY SINCERE APOLO-GIES...
...BUT ARCANA IS BEING KEPT ON STANDBY FOR NOW.


THERE WAS A REPORT OF A SPY AMONG US.
Hunh !?
IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED THAT IF WE RUSH IN, ARCANA MIGHT FRUITLESSLY SUFFER HUGE LOSSES.

KOTSU
KOTSU (TOKO)
KOTSU


.....!
HOW DARE YOU PULL THIS CRAP AT A TIME...
BUTSU (CLICK)
..... LIKE ...
... THIS.

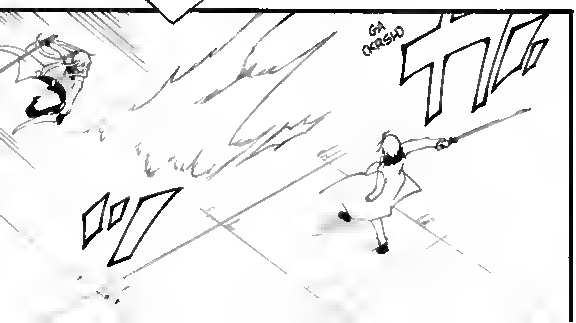
KOTSU
...AHA.
FOUND YOU, GOD CANDIDATE.
BRAIN-WASHED AND MEMORIES WIPED CLEAN, RIGHT?
Yup. But yesterday it seemed like she was on the verge of shaking it.
...YOU.
Hey, Tsukimiya, remember our talk yesterday?
That you didn't used to be Kamu-haburi—
!
GA-(CRASH)

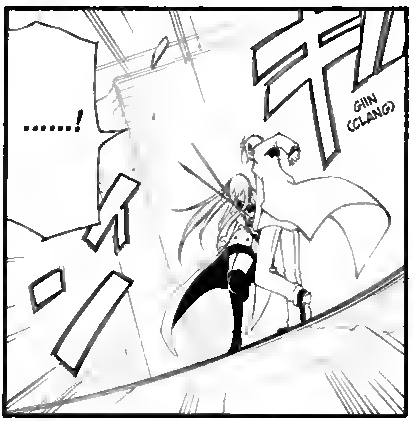
DOSU (SHOONK)
BOTA (SPLAT)
BOTA
I WAS ORIGI-NALLY ONE OF YOU.
YES.
PERO (LICK)
I'M AWARE OF THAT.
DOO (WHOOM)
...SO IN HONOR OF OUR PAST TOGETHER ...
...I'LL COME AT YOU FULL-FORCE FROM THE START.
WHA ...!?

TCH ...!
NONE SHALL STRIKE! ALL GO ASTRAY!
PAN (SNAP)
GYURU (WHIRL)

USE-FUL...
...TRICK.

...WHY, YOU!


GA (KRSH)


.....!
GIIN (CLANG)

TON (TUPP)
She's a huge pain in the ass as an enemy.
KOO (WOOSH)
OMG
CAP-TURE
AN AMATEUR MOVE, LITTLE ONE.
Mmph ...!
GYURU (WHIRL)
!
HEH.
YOU'RE THE AMATEUR.

ZURU (SLIDE)
UNH ...
DOGA (WHAM)
WE'LL RELEASE YOU FROM THEIR CONDI-TIONING LATER.
TAKING THE RELIC IS A HIGHER PRIORITY TONIGHT.
KATSU
.....THAT VOICE...
PURE-BLOOD ...?
KATSU (TAK)
KATSU
KATSU
I.....
WHY AM I.....
BA (LEAP)
HEY! COULD IT BE...
...THE BRAIN-WASH-ING...
UNH... HEAD HURTS.
..... HUH!?

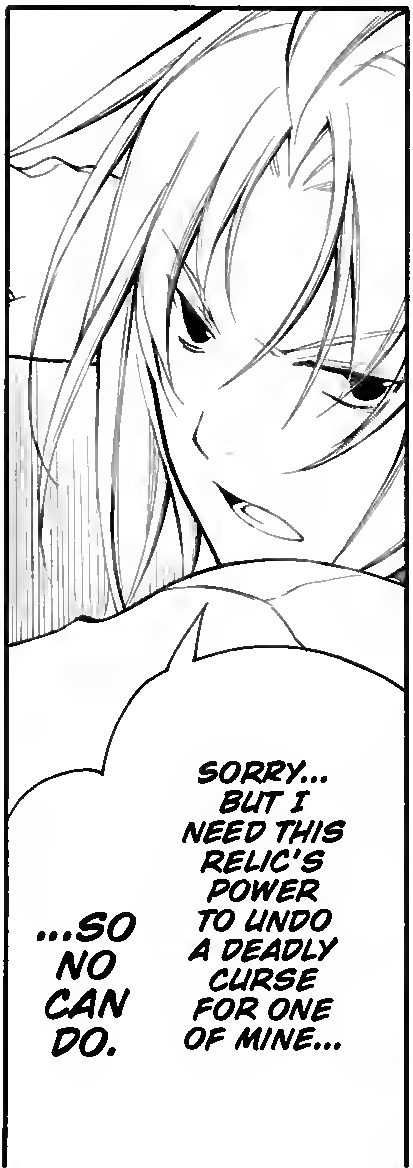
JUST KIDDING! ♥
... YOU!
GNH ...!!
GABU (CHAMP)
GAKII (KSHING)
.....!
BA (FWP)
HYU (FWSH)

.....
HUH?
WASH! (SNAG)
KURU (TURN)
HUH!? HEY, WAIT...!
BYU (ZWOOM)
RE-TREAT !!
YURA (STAGGER)
HEH-HEH... A PURE ANGEL'S BLOOD IS QUITE A TREAT.
I SENSE IT...
...JUST BEHIND THAT DOOR...!
IT EMERGED REALLY CLOSE BY!!
SHUT UP! LIKE I SAID, THE RELIC IS OUR TOP PRIORITY!
Hey!
You can't just abandon Tsuki-miya and run!
BAN (SLAM)

YOU'RE HERE.
IT AP-PEARS ...
...!
...YOU'VE MANAGED TO CLEAR THE OBSTACLES IN YOUR WAY...
...LORD GOD CANDI-DATE.
THE HEAD OF KAMU-HABURI... TOKIWA .....!!

IS THAT THE DIVINE RELIC...? HAND IT OVER RIGHT NOW!
ヒュン
RYU CLASH
HMPH... QUITE A SUITABLE REQUEST. AFTER ALL...
...A GOD CANDIDATE IS ONE CHARGED WITH COLLECTING CRUSADE RELICS.
AS KAMU-HABURI, IT PLEASES ME TO SEE THE CRUSADE PROCEED AS INTENDED.
...HOW-EVER, I APOLO-GIZE...
...BUT I MUST ASK THAT YOU FORGO COLLECTING THIS RELIC.
.....WHAT?

SATSUKI HAS ORDERED US TO KILL YOU.
IF WE BATTLE OVER THIS RELIC...
...I WOULD BE FORCED TO FIGHT YOU WITH AN INTENT TO KILL.

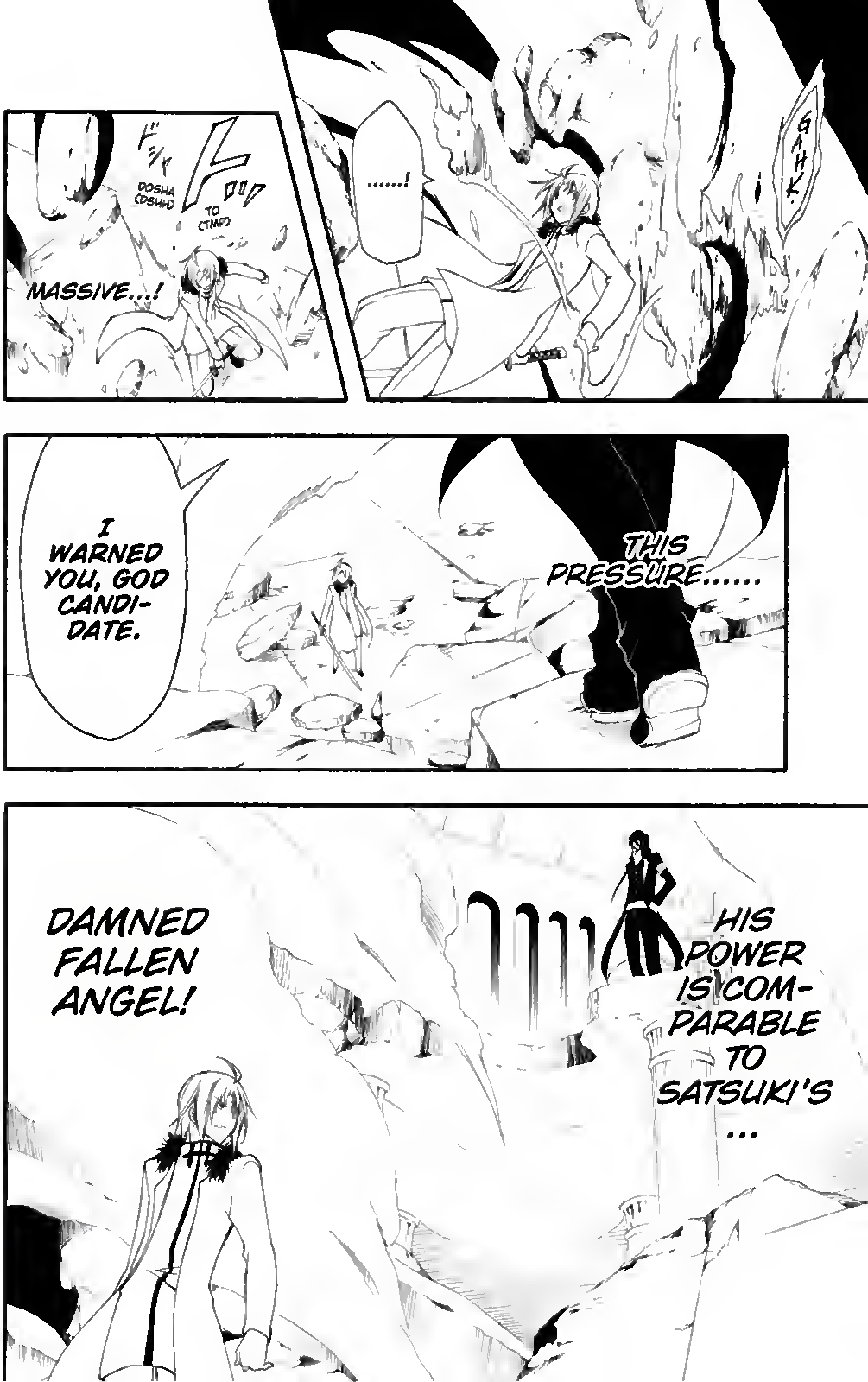

SORRY... BUT I NEED THIS RELIC'S POWER TO UNDO A DEADLY CURSE FOR ONE OF MINE...
...SO NO CAN DO.

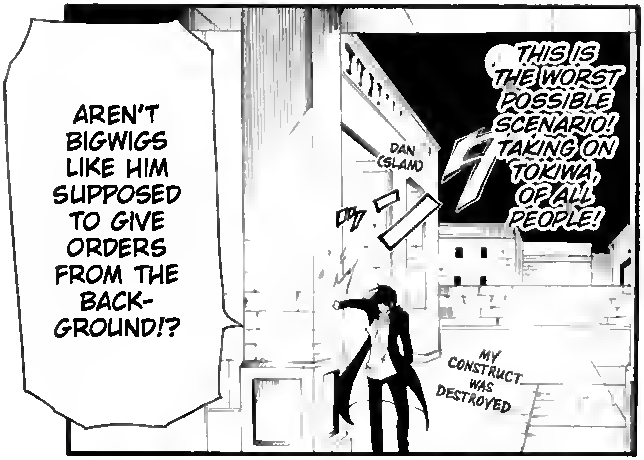
.....

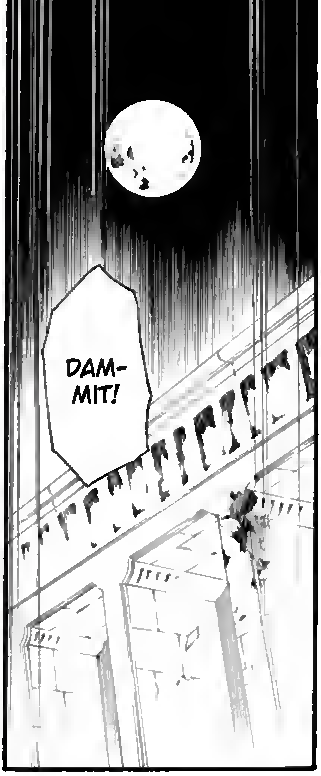
... HMPH.

FINE.
JUST TRY IT! C'MON!
CHA CHIKK

HE'S PLANNING TO UNDO NAO'S MIXED-RACE CURSE...!
SURA (SWHK)
.....AH, GOD CANDIDATE...
...IT IS TRULY REGRETTABLE.
GO (WOOM)
HYU (WOOSH)


GAHK
.....!
DOSHA (DSHH)
TO (TMP)
MASSIVE...!
THIS PRESSURE.....
I WARNED YOU, GOD CANDI-DATE.
HIS POWER IS COM-PARABLE TO SATSUKI'S ...
DAMNED FALLEN ANGEL!


AREN'T BIGWIGS LIKE HIM SUPPOSED TO GIVE ORDERS FROM THE BACK-GROUND!?
DAN (SLAM)
THIS IS THE WORST POSSIBLE SCENARIO! TAKING ON TOKIWA, OF ALL PEOPLE!
MY CONSTRUCT WAS DESTROYED


DAM-MIT!

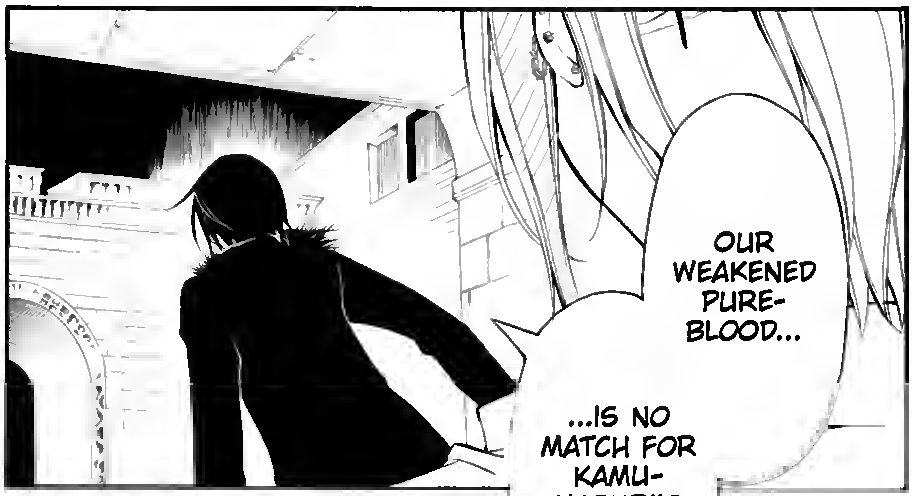
KOTSU
KOTSU (TOK)

NAO ...!

KOTSU
KOTSU

TA (STAND)
WE HAVE A SITUATION. COME WITH ME!

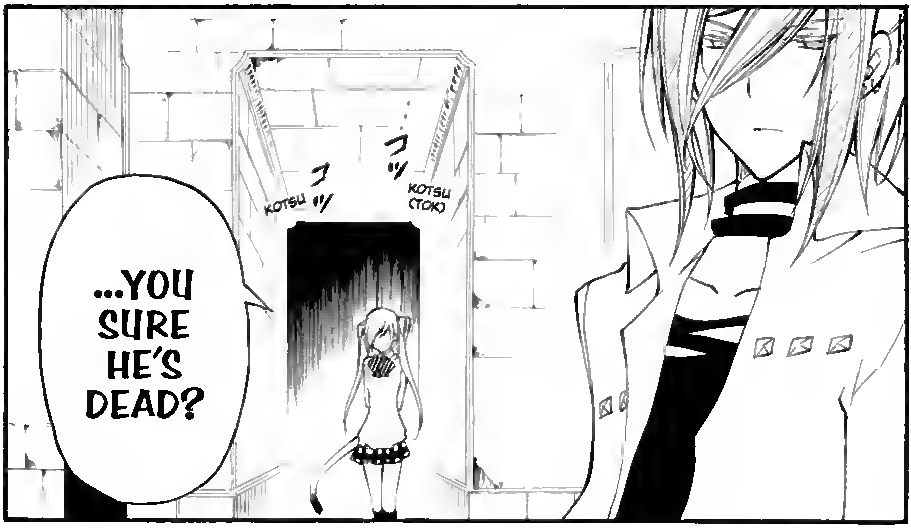
YOU...! WHAT GREAT TIMING!
AHH!
AH...!
WHOA! FOR REAL!?
THIS IS GREAT!!

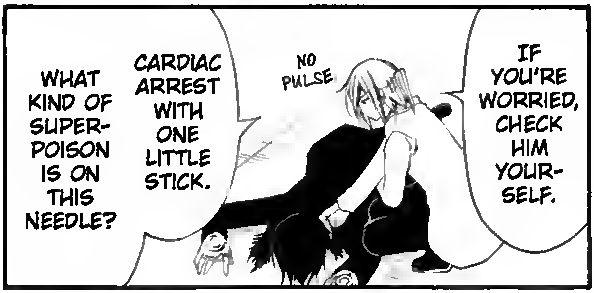

OUR WEAKENED PURE-BLOOD...
...IS NO MATCH FOR KAMU-HABURI'S HEAD HONCHO...

NI (GRIND)

TO (STPP)
GURA (STAGGER)
WHA .....
...Y... YOU...
DO (THUD)
DIE IN PEACE.
HNH
NH...
BIKU
GGH...
BIKU (TWITCH)

TSU (DRIBBLE)


KOTSU
KOTSU (TOK)
...YOU SURE HE'S DEAD?

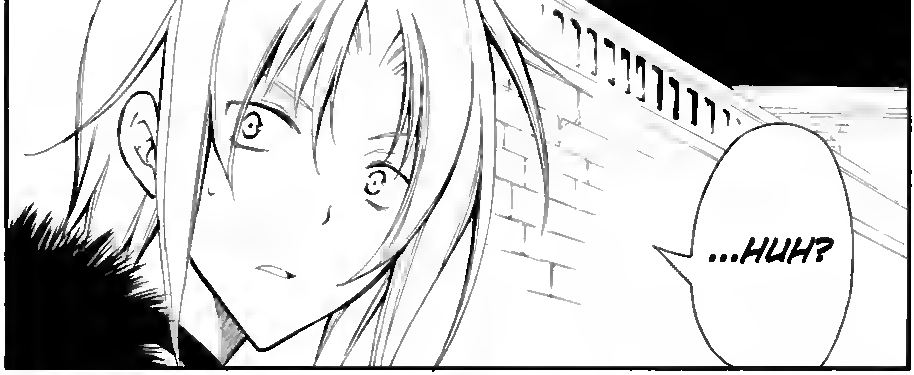

WHAT KIND OF SUPER-POISON IS ON THIS NEEDLE?
CARDIAC ARREST WITH ONE LITTLE STICK.
NO PULSE
IF YOU'RE WORRIED, CHECK HIM YOUR-SELF.

HE'S A PER-SISTENT ONE.

AH-HA-HA, THIS POISON SURE WORKS WONDERS!
GESHI (CHOK)
GESHI
GESHI
HE REALLY IS DEAD.

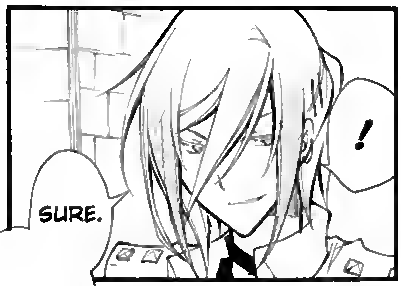
WE'RE SO HAPPY YOU FOLLOWED THROUGH. ♥
HM?
SEE, YOU WERE ABLE TO DO IT AFTER ALL, NAO!
I CHECKED ON THE DOG, AND HE WAS COLD, DEAD MEAT TOO.
DAKI (HUG)
なおき
NAH.
JUST THINKING MAYBE I SHOULDA DONE THIS SOONER.
WHAT IS IT? HAVING SOME REGRETS?
DOON (BROOM)
HEE HEE! ♥

HAAH
...
DAM-
MIT!
HM?


...HUH?

IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE TSUZUKI'S DEAD TOO.
GIIN CCLANG?
...!

NAO ...?
YOU DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO INDULGE DISTRAC-TION...
...LORD GOD CANDI-DATE.

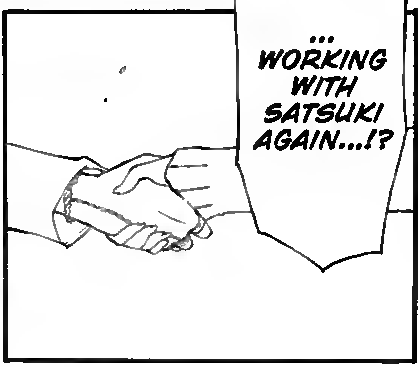

!
SURE.

THAT'D BE GREAT.

SINCE YOU DID SO GOOD, NAO...
...SHALL MOMOSE TAKE YOU TO SATSUKI BEFORE YOU HAVE ANOTHER ATTACK?

.....NAO, YOU'RE...

.....!


... WORKING WITH SATSUKI AGAIN...!?

SAY SOME-THING...
...NAO!!

...TSU-ZUKI.
.....
SORRY...
I...
...COULDN'T WAIT FOR YOU ANYMORE.

NAO!!
.....
GOOD-BYE...
...TSU-ZUKI.

BLOODY CROSS

BLOODY CROSS

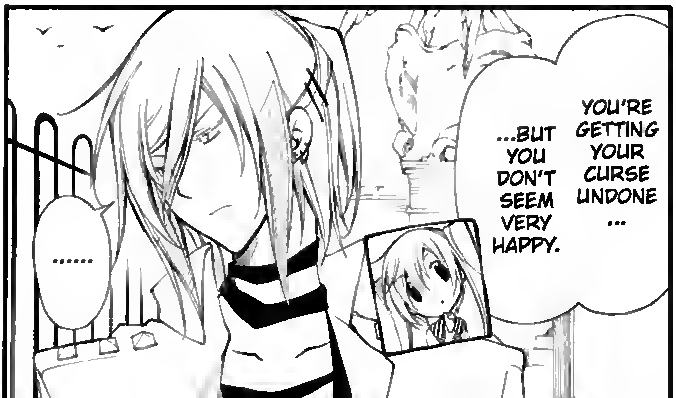
Chapter 42
All for This

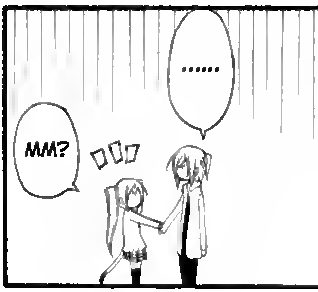
HINATA AND THE DOG...

YOU DID AS YOU WERE TOLD AND KILLED THEM BOTH FOR US.

SATSUKI'S ALL READY TO THANK YOU IN PERSON!
WELL? COME IN, COME IN!
GUI
GUI (TUG)

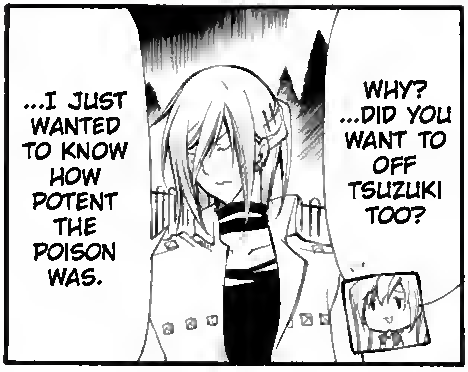
...HE'S INVITED YOU HERE TO HIS TOP-SECRET PLACE!
THAT'S WHY...
SATSUKI'S SUPER HAPPY WITH YOU.

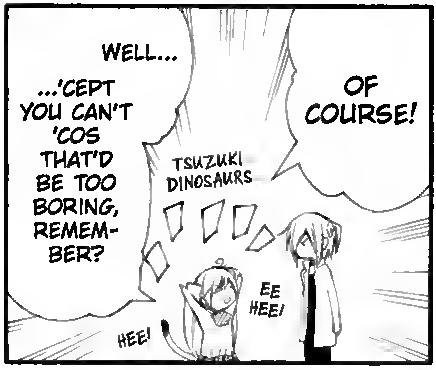

.....
...BUT YOU DON'T SEEM VERY HAPPY.
YOU'RE GETTING YOUR CURSE UNDONE ...

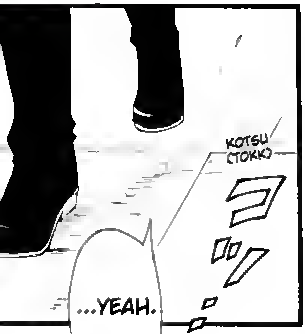

.....
MM?

...THAT I KILLED THE OTHERS WITH...
IS THE POISON STRONG ENOUGH TO KILL EVEN TSUZUKI?

.....
HEY...
THOSE NEE-DLES...


...I JUST WANTED TO KNOW HOW POTENT THE POISON WAS.
WHY? ...DID YOU WANT TO OFF TSUZUKI TOO?

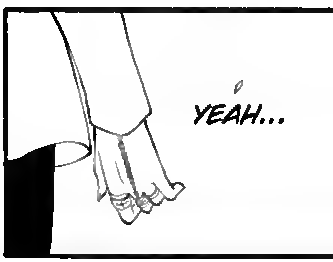

WELL...
...'CEPT YOU CAN'T 'COS THAT'D BE TOO BORING, REMEM-BER?
OF COURSE!
TSUZUKI DINOSAURS
EE HEE!
HEE!


KOTSU CTOKKO
...YEAH.

YOU'RE FINALLY GETTING YOUR WISH!
...HEH.
C'MON, CHEER UP.

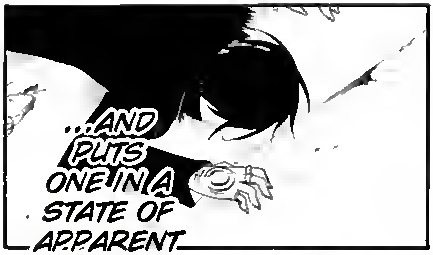
...FOR A CHANCE TO ENTER SATSUKI'S HIDEOUT.

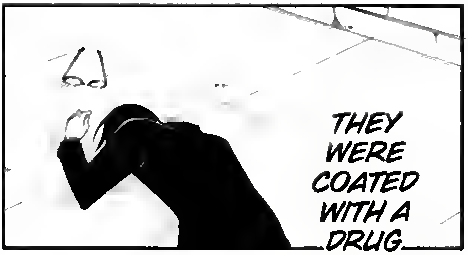
THAT'S RIGHT...
GRI GORE NO
I'VE THROWN EVERY THING AWAY FOR THIS.

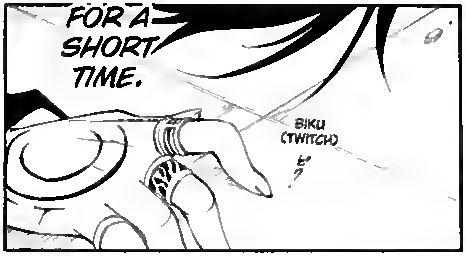

YEAH...

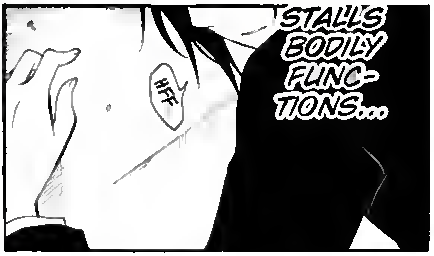
EVERY-THING.....

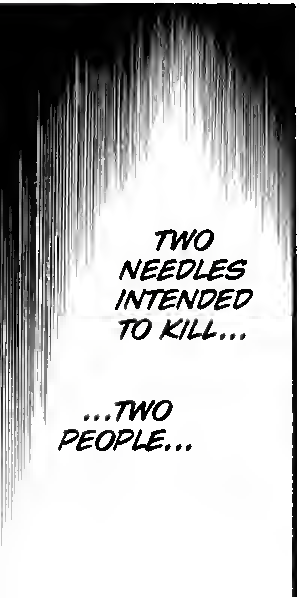
THE NEEDLES I USED ON HANAMURA AND HINATA...
...WERE FAKES.

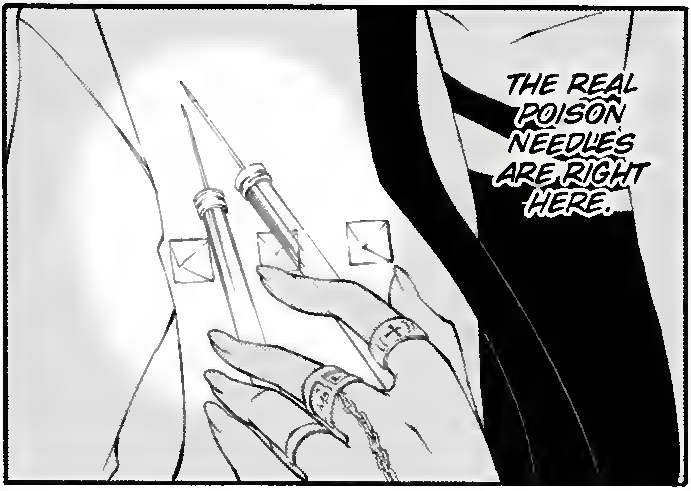

...AND PUTS ONE IN A STATE OF APPARENT DEATH FOR A SHORT TIME.


THEY WERE COATED WITH A DRUG THAT STALLS BODILY FUNC-TIONS...

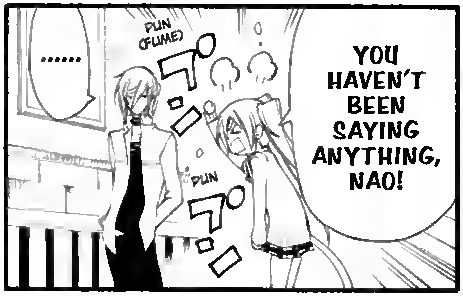

BIKU (TWITCH)

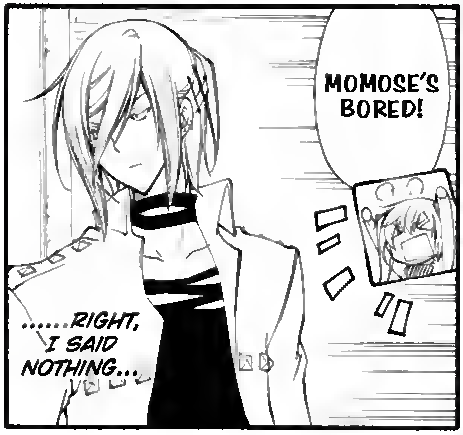

HFF


TWO NEEDLES INTENDED TO KILL...
...TWO PEOPLE...


THE REAL POISON NEEDLES ARE RIGHT HERE.

MRR
...

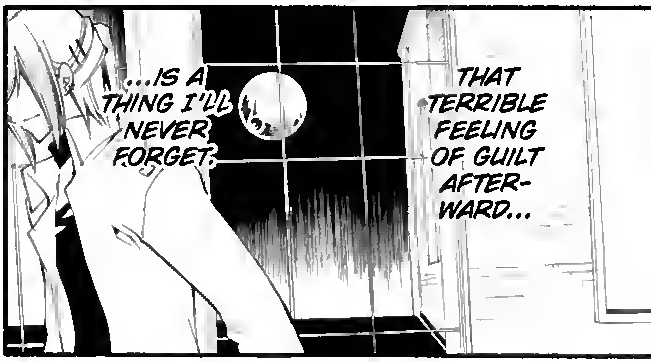

PUN (PLUME)
PUN
.....
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN SAYING ANYTHING, NAO!

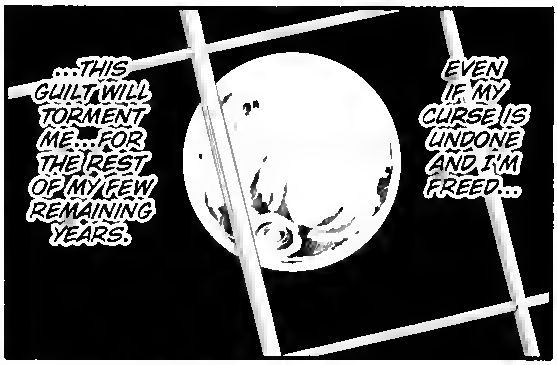

MOMOSE'S BORED!
.....RIGHT, I SAID NOTHING...

POISON... STRONG ENOUGH TO KILL A GOD CANDIDATE.

...AND I DECEIVED TSUZUKI YET AGAIN...
..... NAO, YOU'RE ...
... WORKING WITH SATSUKI AGAIN...!?

...BUT I HAD NO CHOICE.
SAY SOMETHING.....
...NAO!!
EVEN ONCE THE CURSE IS UNDONE...
...I PROBABLY DON'T HAVE MUCH LIFE LEFT.
...TO GET INSIDE SATSUKI'S LAIR.
THIS WAS MY ONLY CHANCE...
THAT'S HOW EXCESSIVELY I'VE PROLONGED THE MARK'S TIME LIMIT.
I FEEL LIKE I'LL ONLY LAST... MAYBE TWO OR THREE MORE YEARS.
...WHICH LED TO MY ALLIES' DEFEAT.
...I GAVE IN TO SATSUKI'S BRIBE TO UNDO MY CURSE...
YESTERDAY...

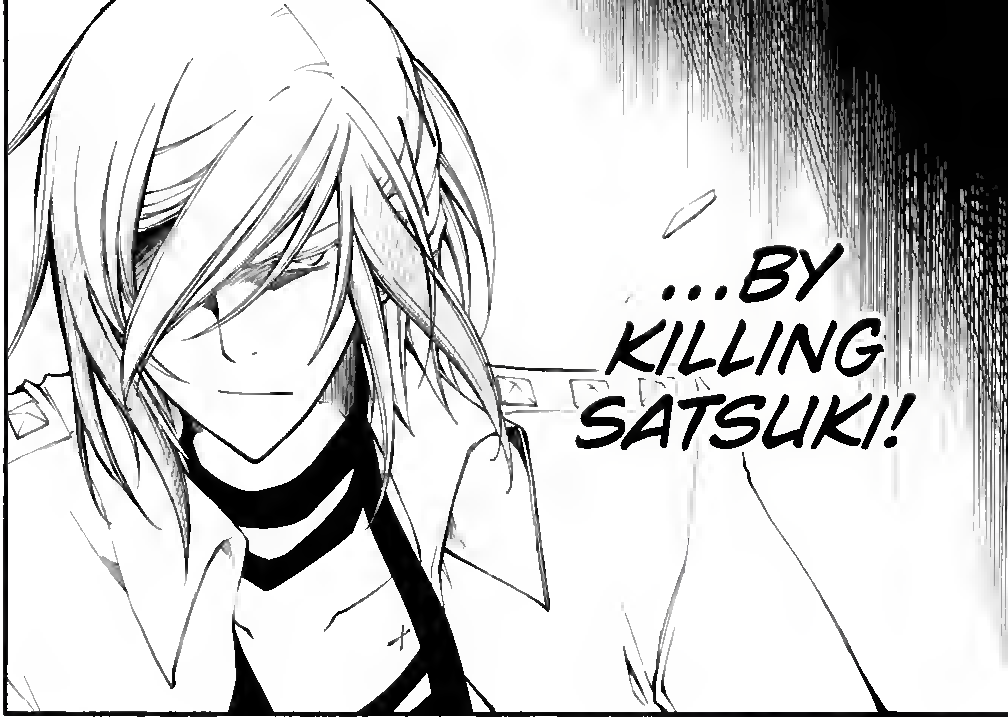

...IS A THING I'LL NEVER FORGET.
THAT TERRIBLE FEELING OF GUILT AFTER-WARD...

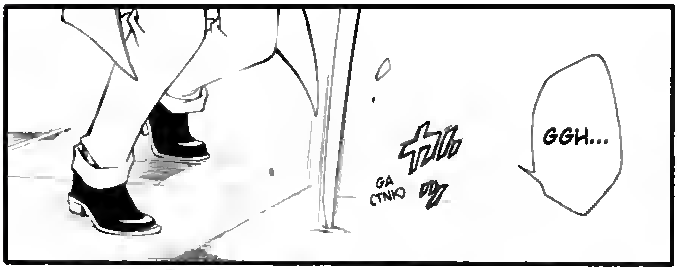

...THIS GUILT WILL TORMENT ME...FOR THE REST OF MY FEW REMAINING YEARS.
EVEN IF MY CURSE IS UNDONE AND I'M FREED...

GIMME A BREAK...!

IF I DON'T HAVE MUCH LONGER TO LIVE ANYWAY, I'D MUCH RATHER JUST DIE NOW...!
A CHOICE BETWEEN GETTING KILLED BY THE CURSE NOW AND SELLING OUT MY ALLIES SO I CAN SURVIVE A FEW YEARS LONGER...?

MY SIN...
...WAS GIVING IN TO TEMP-TATION.
...IS NOT A LIFE I WANT TO LIVE.
ANY LIFE GAINED FROM SUCH A SIN...
AND...I'LL NEVER FORGIVE SATSUKI...
...FOR CAUSING ME TO FALL.
WHICH IS WHY...I...
...WILL ATONE AND SETTLE THE ACCOUNT...


...BY KILLING SATSUKI!


GGH...
GA CHIKO

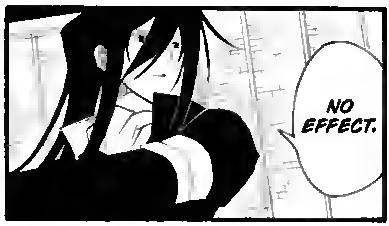
HFF...
HFF...
DAM-MIT.

PLUS... IT'S STRANGE THAT HANAMURA, WHO WAS PARTNERED WITH NAO, HASN'T CALLED.
I DON'T SENSE ANY SIGNS OF LIFE FROM HINATA.
MY BODY ISN'T MOVING LIKE I WANT IT TO...STILL SUFFERING THE FALLOUT FROM LAST NIGHT, I GUESS.
...THAT IDIOT!
YOU SEE NOW? IN YOUR DEBILITATED STATE...
...IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO TAKE THE RELIC FROM ME.
YOU SEEM TO BE IN PAIN, LORD GOD CANDIDATE.
TA (THUD)
TCH ...
WON'T YOU JUST SURRENDER AND DIE?

GHIN (CLANG)

SHUT UP!

IN-CREASE GRAV-ITA-TIONAL FORCE !!


NO EFFECT.

I NEED THAT RELIC TO TEACH A CERTAIN IDIOT A VALUABLE LESSON!!
GU (STRAIN)
GU
DON'T CARE! JUST IT HAND OVER!
GU

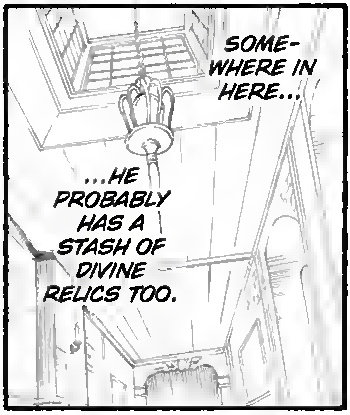
YOU AREN'T ALLOWED TO BETRAY ME OR DIE HOWEVER YOU PLEASE.
GA (OSHI)

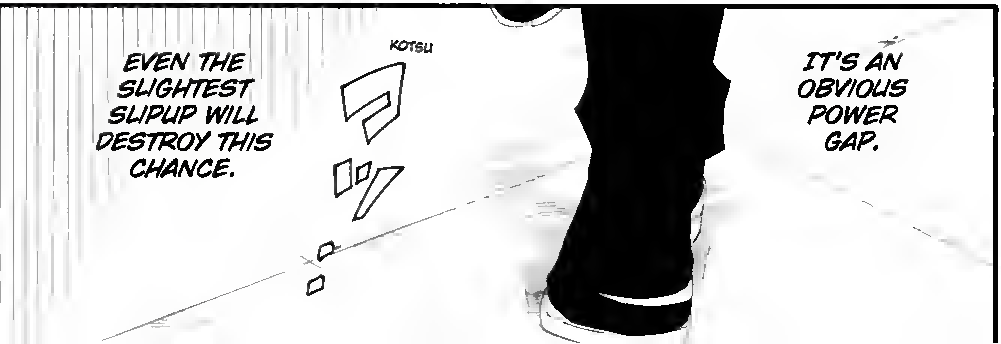
NAO...YOU ARE MY SERVANT.
GU (GRIP)

KOTSU (TOK)
KOTSU
THIS WAY.
I SWEAR I'LL FREE YOU OF YOUR CURSE AND MAKE YOU GROVEL FOR FORGIVENESS!!

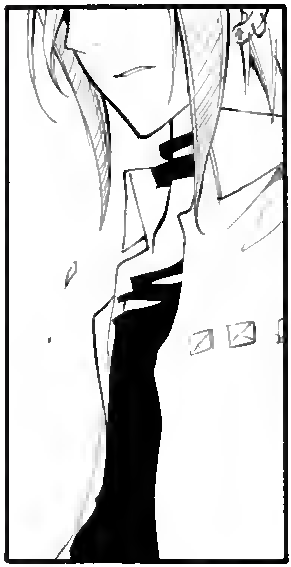
IT WOULD BE IDEAL IF I COULD MANAGE TO KILL SATSUKI AND BRING BACK THE RELICS HE'S TAKEN TO TSUZUKI, BUT...
...AGAINST AN OPPONENT LIKE SATSUKI... IF I GET TOO GREEDY, I MIGHT MISS MY OPENING TO KILL HIM.
KOTSU
KOTSU

.....
ZUN
ZUN (STRIDE)

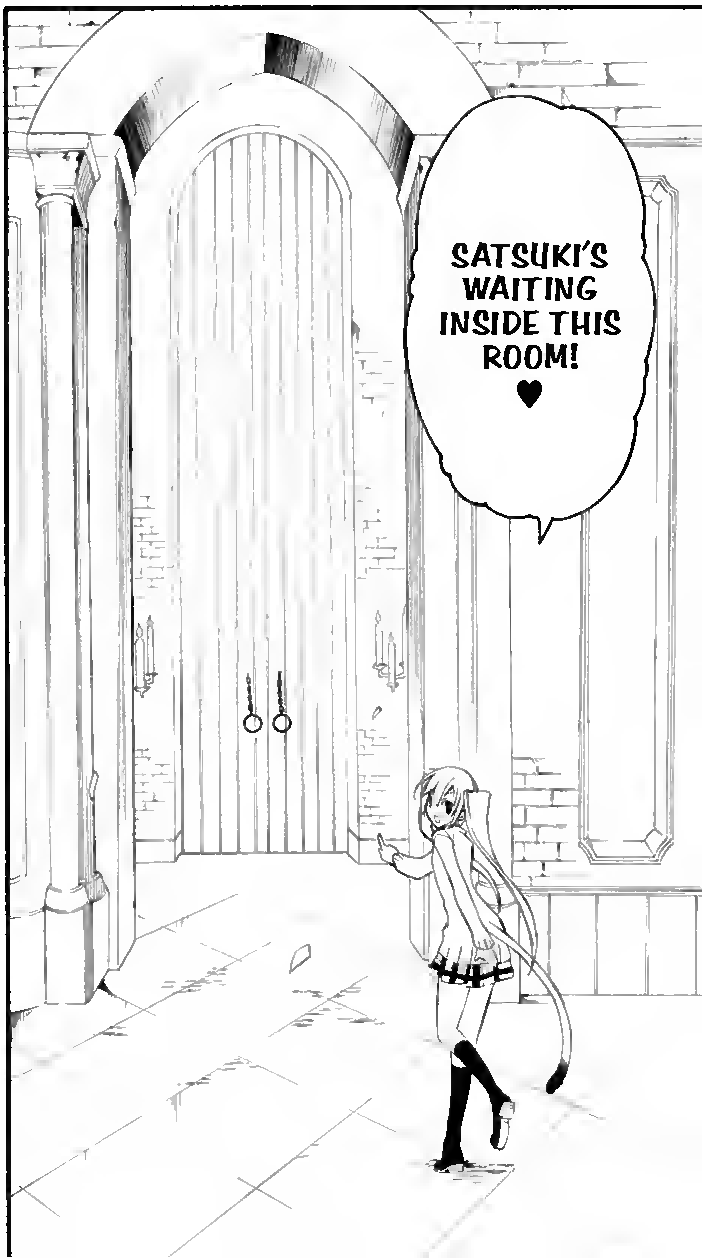

SOME-WHERE IN HERE...
...HE PROBABLY HAS A STASH OF DIVINE RELICS TOO.


EVEN THE SLIGHTEST SLIPUP WILL DESTROY THIS CHANCE.
KOTSU
IT'S AN OBVIOUS POWER GAP.

WE'RE HERE!
I CAN'T LOSE MY FOCUS FOR A SECOND .....



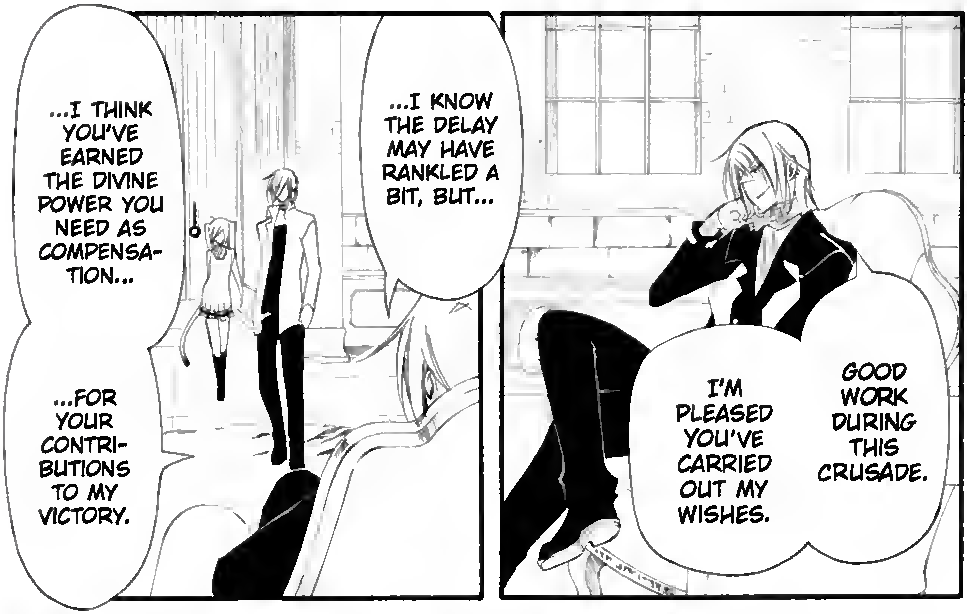
OOMPH!
GAKO (CLUNK)


SATSUKI'S WAITING INSIDE THIS ROOM! ♥

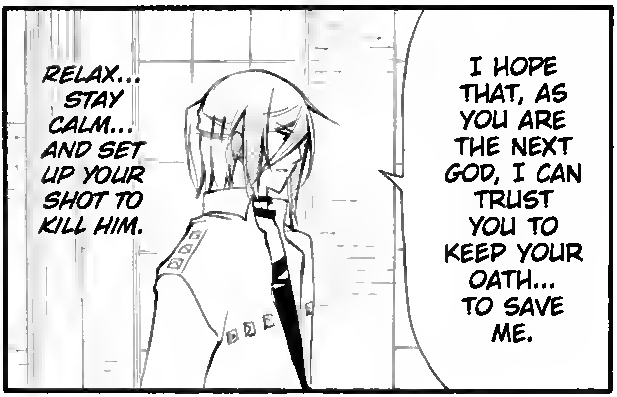
...WE'LL GO DOWN TOGETHER... SATSUKI...
GIII (CREAK)
WORST CASE...
I WILL NOT DIE IN VAIN.
.....
GIRI (CLENCH)
...AND I'LL ATONE FOR MY INNUMERABLE CRIMES...
...AND ME, THE TRAITOROUS SINNER....
I SWEAR...
...I WILL SUCCEED.....!

THIS HOUSE...
...WILL BE THE LAST PLACE HE LAYS EYES ON IN THIS LIFE.

SA-TSUKI ...
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE'VE MET IN PERSON...
...NAO.

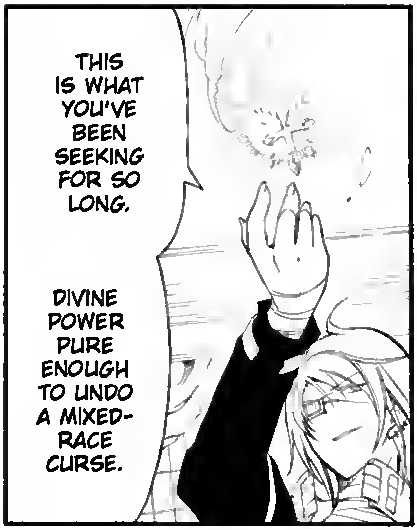

...I KNOW THE DELAY MAY HAVE RANKLED A BIT, BUT...
...I THINK YOU'VE EARNED THE DIVINE POWER YOU NEED AS COMPENSA-TION...
...FOR YOUR CONTRI-BUTIONS TO MY VICTORY.
GOOD WORK DURING THIS CRUSADE.
I'M PLEASED YOU'VE CARRIED OUT MY WISHES.

OF COURSE.
...BUT FIRST, SIT DOWN.
LET'S HAVE A TALK.


RELAX... STAY CALM... AND SET UP YOUR SHOT TO KILL HIM.
I HOPE THAT, AS YOU ARE THE NEXT GOD, I CAN TRUST YOU TO KEEP YOUR OATH... TO SAVE ME.

...YOU MEAN TO DISAP-PEAR FOR A WHILE...
...I HEAR...
... NAO.
TA (TIMP)
TA
TA
MOMOSE, BRING NAO A GLASS, WOULD YOU?
OKAY, I GOT IT!
...HEH HEH...
.....! ...WHAT'S SO FUNNY?
...I'D LIKE TO SPEND IN PEACE AND QUIET.
..... YEAH. WHAT LIFE I HAVE LEFT...
YOU'RE NOT THE GREEDY SORT, ARE YOU?
.....NO, NOTH-ING...
NAO...
... LISTEN ...
...WOULDN'T YOU LIKE TO EXTEND YOUR LIFE LONGER?
.....!

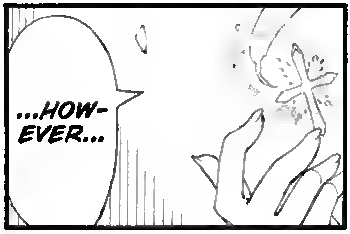
.....
...SO NOW YOU WON'T GIVE ME DIVINE POWER UNLESS I CONTINUE TO WORK FOR YOU?
THAT'S NOT OUR DEAL.
DON'T MISUN-DER-STAND.
I WILL UNDO YOUR CURSE AS I VOWED.
KIII (VWEEND
BUT...
...ARE YOU SURE THAT'S ENOUGH?
...I'VE BEEN DOING SOME THINK-ING...
THE BOOK OF DA'AT...
GOTO (CLUNK)
...HAS BEEN PUT THOUGH ITS PACES. IT HAS VERY LITTLE DIVINE POWER LEFT...
...THOUGH THERE IS ENOUGH TO UNDO THE REST OF YOUR CURSE.
PARI (CRACKLE)


THIS IS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN SEEKING FOR SO LONG.
DIVINE POWER PURE ENOUGH TO UNDO A MIXED-RACE CURSE.

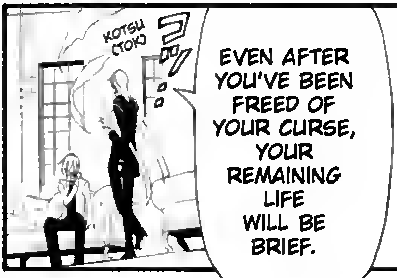
LOOK.
KIII (WHEEND)

...EVEN THIS ALONE WON'T BE ENOUGH.

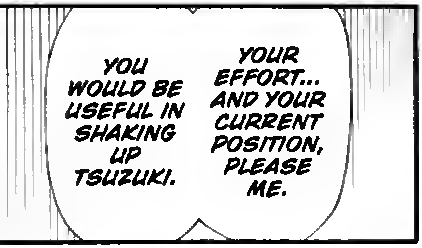
TOKLIN (THROB)
!
MY MARK... IS RESONATING.

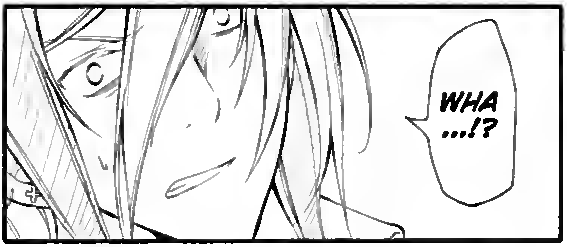

...HOWEVER...

TO (PAT)
THOSE FEW YEARS...
...WILL BE SPENT IN CONSTANT FEAR AS YOU WAIT FOR YOUR DEMISE.


KOTSU (TOK)
EVEN AFTER YOU'VE BEEN FREED OF YOUR CURSE, YOUR REMAINING LIFE WILL BE BRIEF.

IF YOU WANT... I COULD GIVE YOU ENOUGH DIVINE POWER TO FORCIBLY EXTEND YOUR TIME ON THIS EARTH.
I COULD LIBER-ATE YOU FROM THE AGONY OF CERTAIN DEATH.


YOUR EFFORT... AND YOUR CURRENT POSITION, PLEASE ME.
YOU WOULD BE USEFUL IN SHAKING UP TSUZUKI.

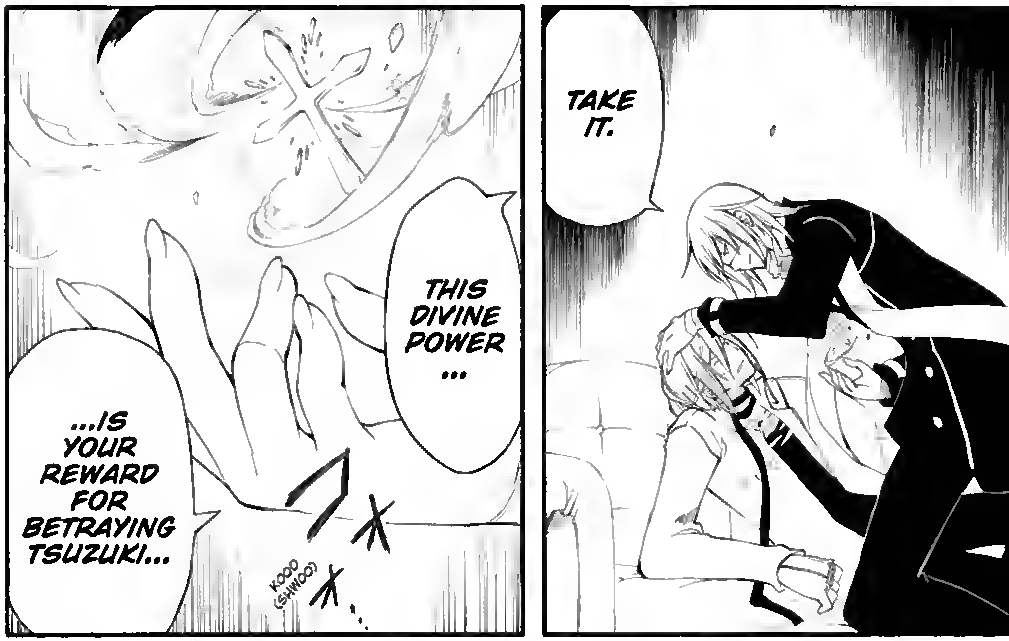

WHA ...!?

DOKU (THROB)

BECOME MY SERVANT ...
... NAO.

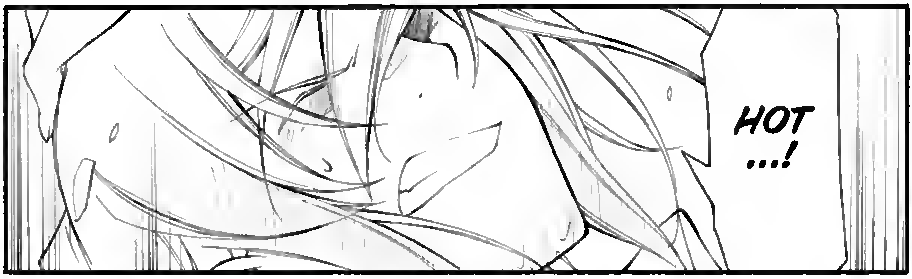
ARE... ...YOU...
.....

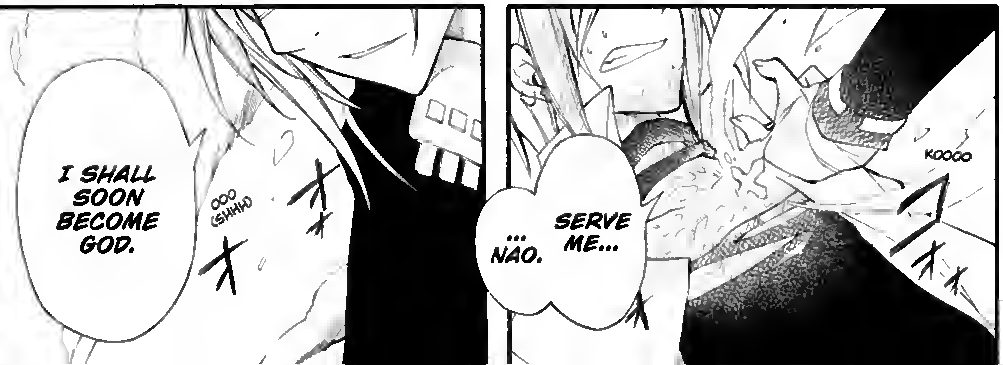
GUI (YANK)
SO IT WAS ONLY ENOUGH TO LAST A DAY, HMM.
THE DIVINE POWER THAT WAS SUSPENDING YOUR FITS HAS RUN OUT.
GAH ...!
DOKUN (THROB)
DOKUN
DOKUN


...IS YOUR REWARD FOR BETRAYING TSUZUKI...
THIS DIVINE POWER ...
KOOO (SHHOO)
TAKE IT.

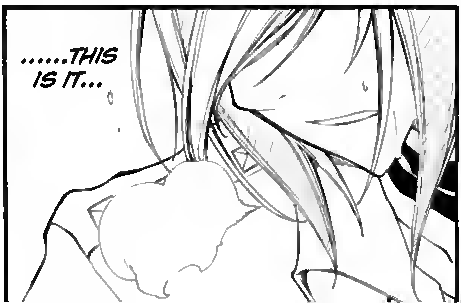
.....
UNH!
...WITHOUT QUESTIONING MY INSTRUCTIONS.

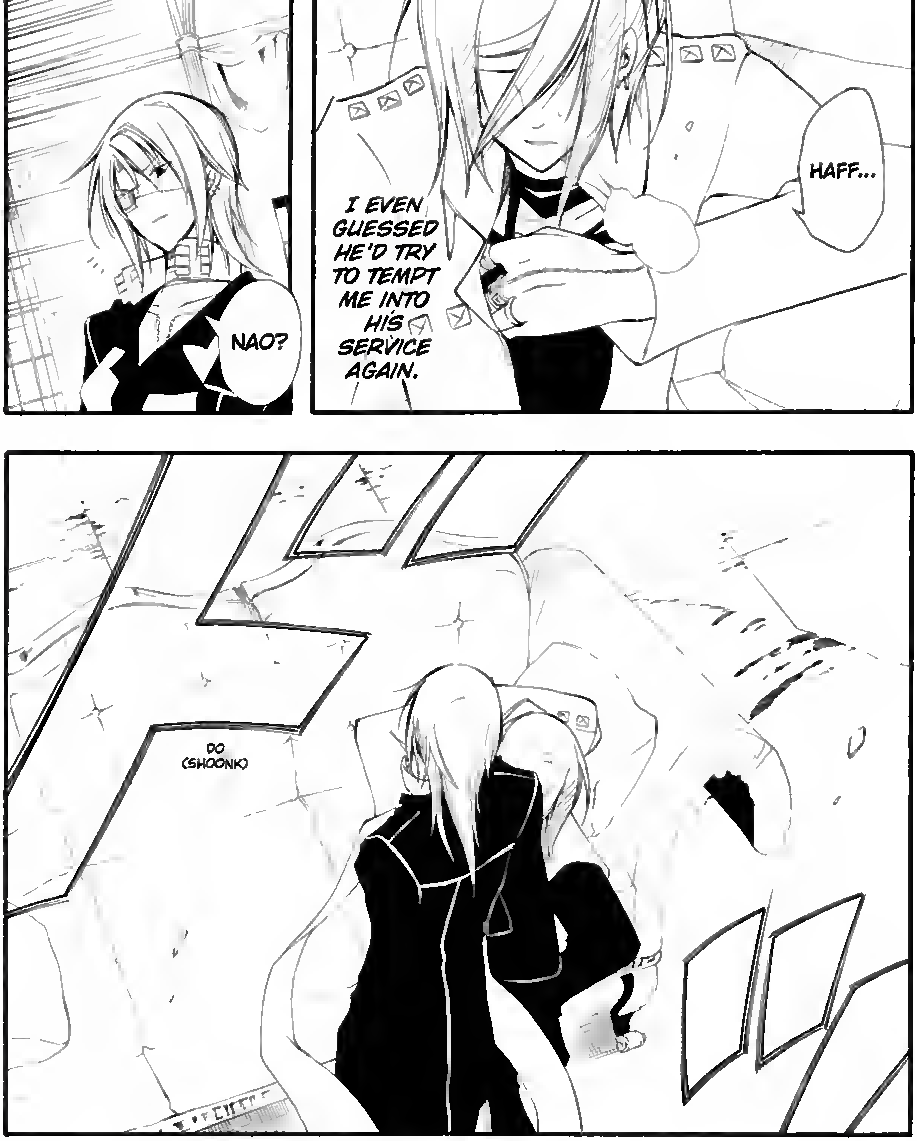
DO (WHOOSH)


HOT ...!


I SHALL SOON BECOME GOD.
OOO (SHHH)
... NAO.
SERVE ME...
KOOGO

THE MOMENT I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR...!





I JUST WAITED...

...FOR HIM...!
...TO GIVE ME THE DIVINE POWER...!!
GGH...
GATA (CLATTER)
HAFF!
RIGHT.
BETTER GIVE YOU THE OTHER ONE TOO.

GA (GRAB)
GAH ...!!
GH...!
DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY...!!
SA-TSUKI .....!!
HAGK ...!
DOSA (WHAM)

HEY!
LEMME GO!!
BUN CYWOOM
HUH?
SATSU-KI—
GYURU CYWHIRL
!?
.....
HFF.
I THOUGHT IT WAS SUPPOSED TO CAUSE INSTANT DEATH...
...SO WHY AREN'T YOU DEAD?
.....HEY...

THIS POISON... CAN'T KILL A FALLEN ANGEL, WHOSE BLOOD IS SATURATED WITH IMPURITIES.
WITH ENOUGH TIME, A FALLEN ONE CAN NULLIFY IT USING ONE'S OWN POWER...
FALLEN ANGELS... ARE "DEBASED" ANGELS...
...WHO HAVE DEFILED THEIR BODIES USING LARGE QUANTITES OF POISON TO KILL THEIR PIETY.....
YOUR END-GAME WAS TOO SOFT.
...HMPH.
AFTER THIS LITTLE STUNT...
WELL.
GIRI (GRIT)
...I HOPE ...
...YOU AREN'T FOOLISH ENOUGH TO THINK YOU WILL LEAVE HERE ALIVE.....
... NAO ...
DOO (WHOOOM)

WHAT A MONSTER!
DAMMIT, HE'S NOT ANY WEAKER DESPITE THE POISON!
BIRI (STING)
BIRI
THIS INTENSE PRESSURE...
GGH ...!
...I ANTICIPATED...
...THIS OUTCOME AS WELL!
.....BUT...
BA (FWASH)
DIE...
...SATSUKI ...!!
DOU (WHOOMP)
BEFORE YOU MANAGE TO COUNTERACT THE POISON...

DOSU
DOSU
DOSU (SHOONK)
TCH ...!!
INVOKING IMPERIAL EDICT...
BO (WOOSH)
...CON-SE-CRATING HELL-FIRE!!

GOOOO (RUMBLE)
I'LL DIE TOGETHER WITH YOU!
HUH ...!?
DON'T TELL ME...
...HE'S GONNA BLOW HIMSELF UP ALONG WITH SATSUKI!?
GUGU (STRUGGLE)
DA (DASH)
YOU SHOULD BE GRATE-FUL!!
YOU DEMON !!
SA-TSUKI! RUN!!
JUUUU (SIZZLE)
SA-TSUKI !!
GGH ...!

I HAVE TO ELIMINATE SATSUKI... TO HELP TSUZUKI BECOME GOD!
I KNOW... TSUZUKI WILL FIND A WAY TO PERPETUATE THE CRUSADES EVEN WITH SATSUKI DEAD.
BORO (CRUMBLE)
!
...WAS BOTH FUN... AND PAINFUL, BUT...
.....STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE...
TAKE THIS...
...IT'S..... IT'S FINALLY GOING TO END.

GOO (BABOOM)
MY...
...FINAL ATONE-MENT!!

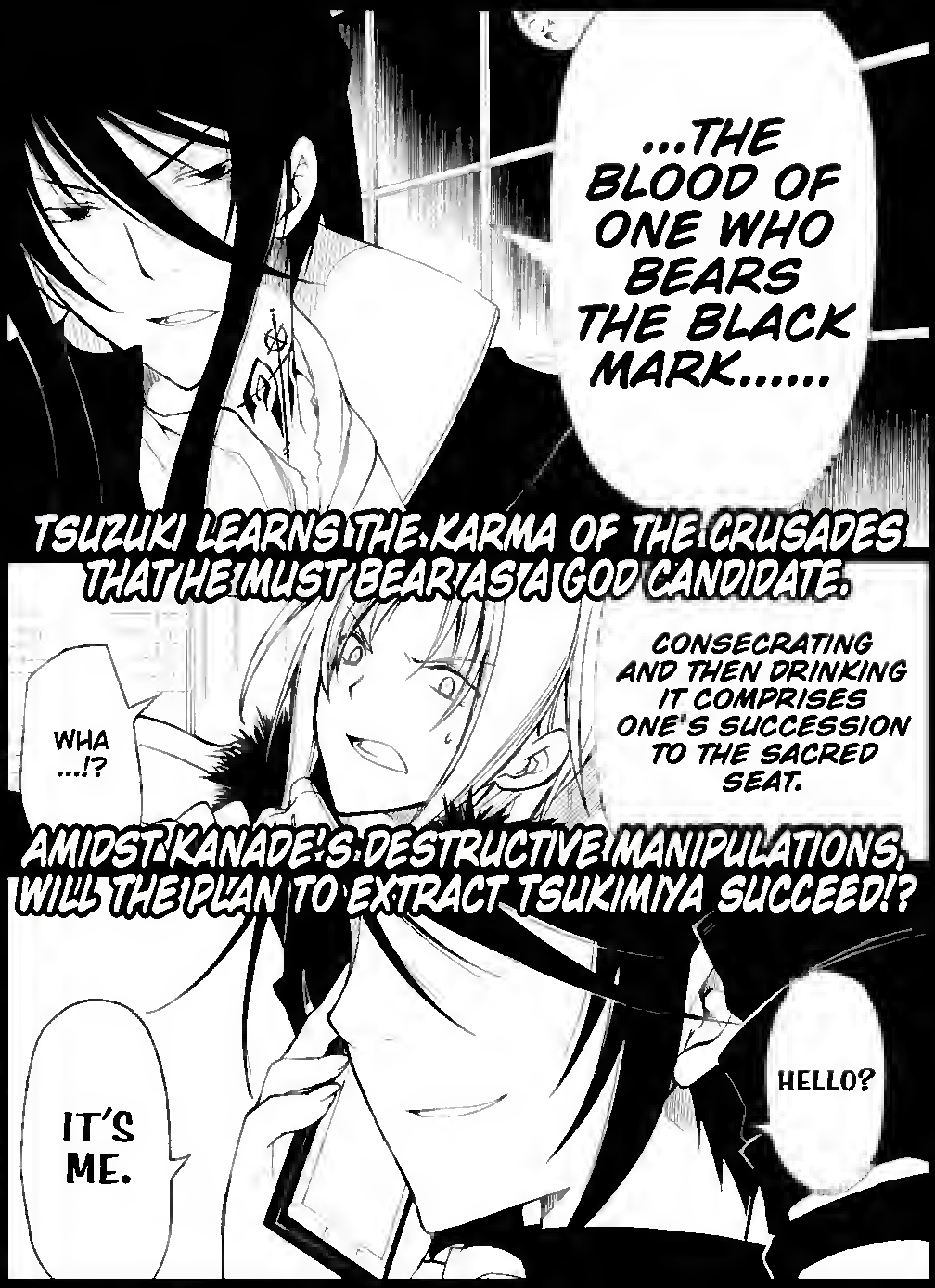
GOD
CRASHOOM
MY...
...FINAL ATONE-MENT!!

SA-
TSUKI
...!!

DOO
GHWOOMD

BLOODY CROSS

...NAO, THAT BAS-TARD...
WHAT THE HECK WAS HE THINKING!?
NAO, WILLING TO SACRIFICE HIS LIFE IN A FINAL SPECIAL ATTACK AGAINST THE FALLEN ANGEL...
IT SEEMS THE PROPHECY BOOKS DIDN'T CONTAIN MUCH DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THE BLACK MARK.
.....!
GUGU (SQUEEZE)
AND WHAT HIDDEN TRUTH WILL TOKIWA OF KAMUHABURI REVEAL!?
.....!
...ALL THIRTEEN DIVINE RELICS WILL HAVE EMERGED.
LISTEN.
WITHIN THE NEXT COUPLE OF CRUSADES ...


...THE BLOOD OF ONE WHO BEARS THE BLACK MARK.....
TSUZUKI LEARNS THE KARMA OF THE CRUSADES THAT HE MUST BEAR AS A GOD CANDIDATE.
CONSECRATING AND THEN DRINKING IT COMPRISES ONE'S SUCCESSION TO THE SACRED SEAT.
WHA ...!?
AMIDST KANADE'S DESTRUCTIVE MANIPULATIONS, WILL THE PLAN TO EXTRACT TSUKIMIYA SUCCEED!?
IT'S ME.
HELLO?

To be Continued in BLOODY CROSS Vol. 9!!

AFTERWORD SCRIBBLES.

AS A MAIN CHARACTER, IT WAS PAINFUL TO WATCH EVEN NAO APPEAR TWICE!

AAAAA (GLOWWW)

ぱぁ

I FINALLY GOT MY SECOND COVER APPEARANCE! CONGRATS, ME!

WITH VOLUME 8...!

...WITH SO LITTLE FACE TIME, MY KAMUHABURI UNIFORM HAS BECOME THE "NEW OUTFIT."

AH HA HA HA HA HA!

WALL

HEH HEH

OH, AND THESE CLOTHES...

I WAS TOLD TO MAKE A WARDROBE CHANGE 'COS PEOPLE WERE TIRED OF LOOKING AT MY OLD OUTFIT, BUT...

TCH!

HMPH !!

BATAN (SLAM)

TSUKUZUKI'S HOUSE

...I'VE BEEN HOLDING BACK 'COS I'M SO HANDSOME IT'D BE A VIOLATION OF REGULATIONS IF I APPEARED AGAIN!

AND AS FOR THE COVERS ...

ZUN (STOMP)

ZUN

MY BEST OUTFIT SUITS ME SO WELL THAT I CAN'T CHANGE IT OUT OF CONSIDERATION FOR MY THIRTY MILLION FANS ACROSS THE COUNTRY!

TWO COVER APPEARANCES!? WARDROBE CHANGE !?

...WAAH, UUHN.
I WISH I COULD BE ON THE COVER OR GET A NEW OUTFIT...
TSUZUKI'S HOUSE
.....
TSUZUKI'S HOUSE
A NEW OUTFIT... SOUNDS LIKE A NICE CHANGE.
TSU-ZUKI...
I'VE BEEN SAVING UP FOR A WARDROBE CHANGE BECAUSE WHEN I GET MORE FACE TIME...
BANK BOOK
ORDINARY ACCOUNT
PAAAAA
...THEY'LL SURELY TELL ME THEY'RE BORED OF MY PLAIN SUIT.
LET'S HOPE THAT HANAMURA GETS MORE FACE TIME SOMEDAY.
THE END.
SORRY I GRIPED ABOUT LUXURIES LIKE COVERS AND OUT-FITS.
SORRY.
THAT SILENCED HIM.

BLOODY CROSS 8

Shiwo Komeyama

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